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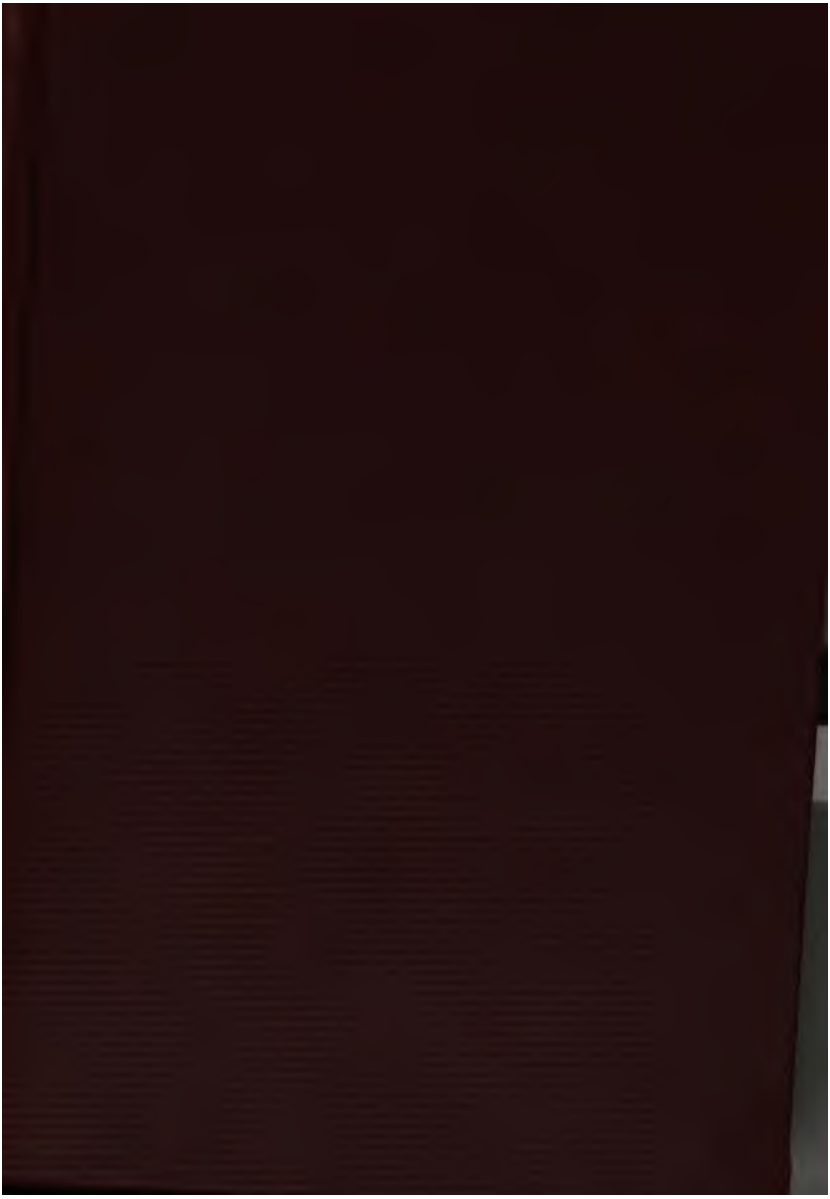

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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A

PRINCESS OF THULE.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,
AUTHOR OF "A DAUGHTER OF HETH."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ
1874.

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It was a still and warm evening in June, and we were in a little old-fashioned inn at the foot of Box-hill—the windows open, a mild west wind blowing through the elms, the yellow sunset shining along the hills. A great silence lay over the valley; the air was fragrant with various scents; doves were calling in the distant trees. In the dusky corner of the room, where the piano stood, some one, with a sweet strange thrill in her voice, was singing of "Lady Barnard," and "Woodstock Town," and the "Bailiff's Daughter." And it occurred to one of the party, sitting at the open window there, that this story, although it dealt with far other scenes, and with people not familiar to us in the south, had nevertheless for its heroine a girl who was brave and bountiful in her love, who was proud, and sweet, and sensitive in all her ways, who was generous to the poor, true to her friends, and loyal to her own high notions of womanhood; and that therefore this story might well be dedicated, as it is now dedicated,

TO OUR GOOD BELLE.

LONDON, *November* 1873.

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A PRINCESS OF THULE.

CHAPTER I.

"Lochaber no more."

On a small headland of the distant island of Lewis, an old man stood looking out on a desolate waste of rain-beaten sea. It was a wild and a wet day. From out of the louring south-west, fierce gusts of wind were driving up volumes and flying rags of cloud, and sweeping onward at the same time the gathering waves that fell hissing and thundering on the shore. Far as the eye could reach, the sea and the air and the sky seemed to be one indistinguishable mass of whirling and hurrying vapour—as if beyond this point there were no more land, but only wind and water, and the confused and awful voices of their strife.

The short, thick-set, powerfully-built man who stood on this solitary point, paid little attention to the rain that ran off the peak of his sailor's cap, or to the gusts of wind that blew about his bushy grey beard. He was still following, with an eye accustomed to pick out objects far at sea, one speck of purple that was now fading into the grey mist of the rain; and the longer he looked the less it became, until the mingled sea and sky showed only the smoke that the great steamer left in its wake. As he stood there, motion-

less and regardless of everything around him, did he cling to the fancy that he could still trace out the path of the vanished ship? A little while before, it had passed almost close to him. He had watched it steam out of Stornoway harbour. As the sound of the engines came nearer, and the big boat went by, so that he could have almost called to it, there was no sign of emotion on the hard and stern face—except, perhaps, that the lips were held firm, and a sort of frown appeared over the eyes. He saw a tiny white handkerchief being waved to him from the deck of the vessel; and he said—almost as though he were addressing some one there—

"My good lass!"

But in the midst of that roaring of the sea and the wind, how could any such message be delivered? —and already the steamer was away from the land, standing out to the lonely plain of waters, and the sound of the engines had ceased, and the figures on the deck had grown faint and visionary. But still there was that one speck of white visible; and the man knew that a pair of eyes that had many a time looked into his own—as if with a faith that such intercommunion could never be broken—were now trying, through over-flowing and blinding tears, to send him a last look of farewell.

The grey mists of the rain gathered within their folds the big vessel, and all the beating hearts it contained; and the fluttering of that little token disappeared with it. All that remained was the sea whitened by the rushing of the wind, and the thunder of waves on the beach. The man who had been gazing so long down into the south-east, turned his face landward,

and set out to walk over a tract of wet grass and sand, towards a road that ran near by. There was a large waggonette, of varnished oak, and a pair of small, powerful horses waiting for him there; and, having dismissed the boy who had been in charge, he took the reins and got up. But even yet the fascination of the sea and of that sad farewell was upon him; and he turned once more as if, now that sight could yield him no further tidings, he would send her one more word of good-bye.

"My poor little Sheila!"—that was all he said; and then he turned to the horses, and sent them on, with his head down to escape the rain, and a look on his face like that of a dead man.

As he drove through the town of Stornoway, the children playing within the shelter of the cottage doors, called to each other in a whisper, and said—

"That is the king of Borva."

But the elderly people said to each other, with a shake of the head—

"It iss a bad day, this day, for Mr. Mackenzie, that he will be going home to an empty house. And it will be a ferry bad thing for the poor folk of Borva, and they will know a great difference, now that Miss Sheila iss gone away, and there iss nobody—not anybody at all—left in the island to tek the side o' the poor folk."

He looked neither to the right nor to the left—though he was known to many of the people—as he drove away from the town into the heart of the lonely and desolate land. The wind had so far died down, and the rain had considerably lessened; but the gloom of the sky was deepened by the drawing on of the

afternoon, and lay heavily over the dreary wastes of moor and hill. What a wild and dismal country was this which lay before and all around him, now that the last traces of human occupation were passed! There was not a cottage, not a stone wall, not a fence to break the monotony of the long undulations of moorland, which, in the distance, rose into a series of hills that were black under the darkened sky. Down from those mountains, ages ago, glaciers had slowly crept to eat out hollows in the plains below; and now, in those hollows were lonely lakes, with not a tree to break the line of their melancholy shores. Everywhere around were the traces of the glacier-drift—great grey boulders of gneiss fixed fast into the black peat-moss, or set amid the browns and greens of the heather. The only sound to be heard in this wilderness of rock and morass, was the rushing of various streams, rain-swollen and turbid, that plunged down their narrow channels to the sea.

The rain now ceased altogether; but the mountains in the far south had grown still darker; and, to the fisherman passing by the coast, it must have seemed as though the black peaks were holding converse with the louring clouds, and that the silent moorland beneath was waiting for the first roll of the thunder. The man who was driving along the lonely route sometimes cast a glance down towards this threatening of a storm; but he paid little heed to it. The reins lay loose on the backs of the horses; and at their own pace they followed, hour after hour, the rising and falling road that led through the moorland and past the gloomy lakes. He may have recalled mechanically the names of those stretches of water—

the Lake of the Sheiling, the Lake of the Oars, the Lake of the Fine Sand, and so forth—to measure the distance he had traversed; but he seemed to pay little attention to the objects around him, and it was with a glance of something like surprise that he suddenly found himself overlooking that great sea-loch on the western side of the island in which was his home.

He drove down the hill to the solitary little inn of Garra-na-hina. At the door, muffled up in a warm woollen plaid, stood a young girl, fair-haired, blue-eyed, and diffident in look.

"Mr. Mackenzie," she said, with that peculiar and pleasant intonation that marks the speech of the Hebridean who has been taught English in the schools, "it wass Miss Sheila wrote to me to Suainabost, and she said I might come down again from Suainabost and see if I can be of any help to you in the house."

The girl was crying, although the blue eyes looked bravely through the tears as if to disprove the fact.

"Ay, my good lass," he said, putting his hand gently on her head, "and it wass Sheila wrote to you?"

"Yes, sir, and I hef come down from Suainabost."

"It is a lonely house you will be going to," he said, absently. "When you wass staying with us before, there wass some one in the house that you would be talking with. Now it will be ferry different for you."

"But Miss Sheila said I wass—I wass to—"—but here the young girl failed in her effort to explain that Miss Sheila had asked her to go down to make the house less lonely. The elderly man in the waggonette seemed scarcely to notice that she was crying; he bade her come up beside him; and when he had got her

into the waggonette, he left some message with the innkeeper, who had come to the door, and drove off again.

They drove along the high land that overlooks a portion of Loch Roag, with its wonderful network of islands and straits; and then they stopped on the lofty plateau of Callernish, where there was a man waiting to take the waggonette and horses.

"And you would be seeing Miss Sheila away, sir?" said the man, "and it wass Duncan Macdonald will say that she will not come back no more to Borva."

The old man with the big grey beard only frowned and passed on. He and the girl made their way down the side of the rocky hill to the shore; and here there was an open boat awaiting them. When they approached, a man considerably over six feet in height, keen-faced, grey-eyed, straight-limbed, and sinewy in frame, jumped into the big and rough boat, and began to get ready for their departure. There was just enough wind to catch the brown mainsail; and the King of Borva took the tiller, his henchman sitting down by the mast. And no sooner had they left the shore and stood out towards one of the channels of this arm of the sea, than the tall, spare keeper began to talk of that which made his master's eye grow dark.

"Ah, well," he said, in the plaintive drawling of his race, "and it iss an empty house you will be going to, Mr. Mackenzie, and it iss a bad thing for us all that Miss Sheila hass gone away—and it iss many's ta time she will hef been wis me in this very boat——"

"— — — —you, Duncan Macdonald!" cried Mackenzie, in an access of fury, "what will you talk

of like that? It iss every man, woman, and child on the island will talk of nothing but Sheila! I will drive my foot through the bottom of the boat, if you do not hold your peace!"

The tall gillie patiently waited until his master had exhausted his passion, and then he said, as if nothing had occurred—

"And it will not do much good, Mr. Mackenzie, to tek ta name o' Kott in vain—and there will be ferry much more of that now since Miss Sheila iss gone away, and there will be much more of trinking in ta island, and it will be a great difference, mirover. And she will be so far away that no one will see her no more—far away beyond ta Sound of Sleat, and far away beyond Oban, as I hef heard people say. And what will she do in London, when she has no boat at all, and she will never go out to ta fishing, and I will hear people say that you will walk a whole day and never come to ta sea, and what will Miss Sheila do for that? And she will tame no more o' ta wild ducks' young things, and she will find out no more o' ta nests in the rocks, and she will hef no more horns when the deer is killed, and she will go out no more to see ta cattle swim across Loch Roag when they go to ta sheilings. It will be all different, all different now; and she will never see us no more—and it iss as bad as if you wass a poor man, Mr. Mackenzie, and had to let your sons and your daughters go away to America, and never come back no more. And she ta only one in your house, and it wass the son o' Mr. Macintyre of Sutherland he would hef married her, and come to live on ta island; and not hef Miss Sheila go away among strangers that

doesna ken her family, and will put no store by her, no more than if she wass a fisherman's lass. It wass Miss Sheila herself had a sore heart tis morning when she went away—and she turned and she looked at Borva as the boat came away—and I said tis is the last time Miss Sheila will be in her boat, and she will not come no more again to Borva."

Mr. Mackenzie heard not one word or syllable of all this. The dead, passionless look had fallen over the powerful features; and the deep-set eyes were gazing, not on the actual Loch Roag before them, but on the stormy sea that lies between Lewis and Skye, and on a vessel disappearing in the mist of the rain. It was by a sort of instinct that he guided this open boat through the channels, which were now getting broader as they neared the sea; and the tall and grave-faced keeper might have kept up his garrulous talk for hours, without attracting a look or a word.

It was now the dusk of the evening, and wild and strange, indeed, was the scene around the solitary boat as it slowly moved along. Large islands—so large that any one of them might have been mistaken for the mainland—lay over the dark waters of the sea, remote, untenanted and silent. There were no white cottages along these rocky shores—only a succession of rugged cliffs and sandy bays but half mirrored in the sombre water below. Down in the south the mighty shoulders and peaks of Suainabhal and his brother mountains were still darker than the darkening sky; and when, at length, the boat had got well out from the network of islands, and fronted the broad waters of the Atlantic, the great plain of the western

sea seemed already to have drawn around it the solemn mantle of the night.

"Will ye go to Borvabost, Mr. Mackenzie, or will we run her into your own house?" asked Duncan—Borvabost being the name of the chief village on the island.

"I will not go on to Borvabost," said the old man, peevishly. "Will they not hef plenty to talk about at Borvabost?"

"And it iss no harm that ta folk will speak of Miss Sheila," said the gillie, with some show of resentment, "it iss no harm, they will be sorry she is gone away—no harm at all—for it wass many things they had to thank Miss Sheila for—and now it will be all ferry different——"

"I tell you, Duncan Macdonald, to hold your peace!" said the old man, with a savage glare of the deep-set eyes; and then Duncan relapsed into a sulky silence, and the boat held on its way.

In the gathering twilight a long grey curve of sand became visible, and into the bay thus indicated, Mackenzie turned his small craft. This indentation of the island seemed as blank of human occupation as the various points and bays they had passed; but as they neared the shore a house came into sight, about halfway up the slope rising from the sea to the pasture-land above. There was a small stone pier jutting out at one portion of the bay, where a mass of rocks was imbedded in the white sand; and here at length the boat was run in, and Mackenzie helped the young girl ashore.

The two of them—leaving the gillie to moor the little vessel that had brought them from Callernish—

went silently towards the shore, and up the narrow road leading to the house. It was a square, two-storeyed substantial building of stone; but the stone had been liberally oiled to keep out the wet, and the blackness thus produced had not a very cheerful look. Then, on this particular evening, the scant bushes surrounding the house hung limp and dark in the rain; and amid the prevailing hues of purple, blue-green, and blue, the bit of scarlet coping running round the black house was wholly ineffective in relieving the general impression of dreariness and desolation.

The King of Borva walked into a large room, which was but partially lit by two candles on the table, and by the blaze of a mass of peats in the stone fireplace, and threw himself into a big easy-chair. Then he suddenly seemed to recollect his companion, who was timidly standing near the door, with her shawl still round her head.

"Mairi," he said, "go and ask them to give you some dry clothes. Your box it will not be here for half-an-hour yet."

Then he turned to the fire.

"But you yourself, Mr. Mackenzie, you will be ferry wet——"

"Never mind me, my lass—go and get yourself dried."

"But it wass Miss Sheila," began the girl, diffidently, "it wass Miss Sheila asked me—she asked me to look after you, sir——"

With that he rose abruptly, and advanced to her, and caught her by the wrist. He spoke quite quietly to her, but the girl's eyes, looking up at the stern face, were a trifle frightened.

"You are a ferry good little girl, Mairi," he said, slowly, "and you will mind what I say to you. You will do what you like in the house—you hef been in the house before and you will know what to do—you will take Sheila's place as much as you like—but you will mind this, not to mention her name, not once. Now go away, Mairi, and find Scarlett Macdonald, and she will give you some dry clothes; and you will tell her to send Duncan down to Borvabost, and bring up John the Piper, and Alister-nan-Each, and the lads of the *Nighean dubh*, if they are not gone home to Habost yet. But it iss John the Piper must come directly."

The girl went away to seek counsel of Scarlett Macdonald, Duncan's wife; and Mr. Mackenzie proceeded to walk up and down the big and half-lit chamber. Then he went to a cupboard, and put out on the table a number of tumblers and glasses, with two or tree odd-looking bottles of Norwegian make—consisting of four semicircular tubes of glass meeting at top and bottom, leaving the centre of the vessel thus formed open. He stirred up the blazing peats in the fireplace. He brought down from a shelf a tin box filled with coarse tobacco, and put it on the table. But he was evidently growing impatient; and at last he put on his cap again and went out into the night.

The air blew cold in from the sea, and whistled through the bushes that Sheila had trained about the porch. There was no rain now, but a great and heavy darkness brooded overhead; and in the silence he could hear the breaking of the waves along the hard coast. But what was this other sound he heard—wild

and strange in the stillness of the night—a shrill and plaintive cry that the distance softened until it almost seemed to be the calling of a human voice? Surely those were words that he heard, or was it only that the old, sad air spoke to him?—

"For Lochaber no more, Lochaber no more,
Maybe to return to Lochaber no more"

—that was the message that came to him out of the darkness, and it seemed to him as if the sea, and the night, and the sky were wailing over the loss of his Sheila. He walked away from the house, and up the hill behind. Led by the sound of the pipes, that grew louder and more unearthly as he approached, he found himself at length on a bit of high table-land overlooking the sea, where Sheila had had a rude bench of iron and wood fixed into the rock. On this bench sat a little old man, hump-backed and bent, and with long white hair falling down to his shoulders. He was playing the pipes—not wildly and fiercely as if he were at a drinking-bout of the lads come home from the Caithness fishing, nor yet gaily and proudly as if he were marching at the head of a bridal procession, but slowly, mournfully, monotonously, as though he were having the pipes talk to him.

Mackenzie touched him on the shoulder, and the old man started.

"Is it you, Mr. Mackenzie?" he said, in Gaelic, "it is a great fright you have given me."

"Come down to the house, John. The lads from Habost, and Alister, and some more will be coming; and you will get a ferry good dram, John, to put wind in the pipes."

"It is no dram I am thinking of, Mr. Mackenzie,"

said the old man. "And you will have plenty of company without me. But I will come down to the house, Mr. Mackenzie—oh, yes. I will come down to the house—but *in a little while* I will come down to the house."

Mackenzie turned from him with a petulant exclamation, and went along and down the hill rapidly, as he could hear voices in the darkness. He had just got into the house, when his visitors arrived. The door of the room was opened, and there appeared some six or eight tall and stalwart men, mostly with profuse brown beards and weather-beaten faces, who advanced into the chamber with some show of shyness. Mackenzie offered them a rough and hearty welcome; and, as soon as their eyes had got accustomed to the light, bade them help themselves to the whisky on the table. With a certain solemnity each poured out a glass, and drank "*Shlainte!*" to his host as if it were some funeral rite. But when he bade them replenish their glasses, and got them seated with their faces to the blaze of the peats, then the flood of Gaelic broke loose. Had the wise little girl from Suainabost warned those big men? There was not a word about Sheila uttered. All their talk was of the reports that had come from Caithness, and of the improvements of the small harbour near the Butt, and of the black sea-horse that had been seen in Loch Suainabhal, and of some more sheep having been found dead on the Flannen Isles, shot by the men of the English smacks. Pipes were lit, the peats stirred up anew, another glass or two of whisky drunk, and then, through the haze of the smoke, the browned faces of the men could be seen in eager controversy, each talking faster than the other, and

comparing facts and fancies that had been brooded over through solitary nights of waiting on the sea. Mackenzie did not sit down with them—he did not even join them in their attention to the curious whisky-flasks. He paced up and down the opposite side of the room, occasionally being appealed to with a story or a question, and showing by his answers that he was but vaguely hearing the vociferous talk of his companions. At last he said—

"Why the teffle does not John the Piper come? Here, you men—you sing a song—quick! None of your funeral songs, but a good brisk one of trinking and fighting!"

But were not nearly all their songs—like those of most dwellers on a rocky and dangerous coast—of a sad and sombre hue, telling of maidens whose lovers were drowned, and of wives bidding farewell to husbands they were never to see again? Slow and mournful are the songs that the northern fishermen sing as they set out in the evening, with the creaking of their long oars keeping time to the music, until they get out beyond the shore to hoist the red mainsail and catch the breeze blowing over from the regions of the sunset. Not one of these Habost fishermen could sing a brisk song; but the nearest approach to it was a ballad in praise of a dark-haired girl, which they, owning the *Nighean dubh*, were bound to know. And so one young fellow began to sing—

"Mo Nighean dubh d'fhas boidheach dubh,
Mo Nighean dubh na treig mi," *

in a slow and doleful fashion, and the others joined

* "My black-haired girl, my pretty girl, my black-haired girl, don't leave me."—*Nighean dubh* is pronounced *Nyean du.*

in the chorus with a like solemnity. In order to keep time, four of the men followed the common custom of taking a pocket handkerchief (in this case, an immense piece of brilliant red silk, which was evidently the pride of its owner), and holding it by the four corners, letting it slowly rise and fall as they sang. The other three men laid hold of a bit of rope, which they used for the same purpose. "*Mo Nighean dubh*," unlike most of the Gaelic songs, has but a few verses; and as soon as they were finished, the young fellow, who seemed pleased with his performances, started another ballad. Perhaps he had forgotten his host's injunction; perhaps he knew no merrier song; but, at any rate, he began to sing the "Lament of Monaltrie." It was one of Sheila's songs. She had sung it the night before in this very room; and her father had listened to her describing the fate of young Monaltrie as if she had been foretelling her own, and scarcely dared to ask himself if ever again he should hear the voice that he loved so well. He could not listen to the song. He abruptly left the room, and went out once more into the cool night air and the darkness. But even here he was not allowed to forget the sorrow he had been vainly endeavouring to banish; for in the far distance the pipes still played the melancholy wail of Lochaber. "*Lochaber no more! Lochaber no more!*" that was the only solace brought him by the winds from the sea; and there were tears running down the hard grey face as he said to himself, in a broken voice—

"Sheila, my good lass, why did you go away from Borva?"

CHAPTER II.

The Fair-haired Stranger.

"WHY, you must be in love with her yourself!"

"I in love with her? Sheila and I are too old friends for that!"

The speakers were two young men, seated in the stern of the steamer *Clansman*, as she ploughed her way across the blue and rushing waters of the Minch. One of them was a tall young fellow of three-and-twenty, with fair hair, and light blue eyes, whose delicate and mobile features were handsome enough in their way, and gave evidence of a nature at once sensitive, nervous, and impulsive. He was clad in light grey from head to heel—a colour that suited his fair complexion and yellow hair; and he lounged about the white deck in the glare of the sunlight, steadying himself from time to time, as an unusually big wave carried the *Clansman* aloft for a second or two, and then sent her staggering and groaning into a hissing trough of foam. Now and again he would pause in front of his companion, and talk in a rapid, playful and even eloquent fashion for a minute or two; and then, apparently a trifle annoyed by the slow and patient attention which greeted his oratorical efforts, would start off once more on his unsteady journey up and down the white planks.

The other was a man of thirty-eight, of middle height, sallow complexion, and generally insignificant appearance. His hair was becoming prematurely grey. He rarely spoke. He was dressed in a suit of rough blue cloth; and, indeed, looked somewhat like a pilot

who had gone ashore, taken to study, and never recovered himself. A stranger would have noticed the tall and fair young man, who walked up and down the gleaming deck, evidently enjoying the brisk breeze that blew about his yellow hair, and the sunlight that touched his pale and fine face, or sparked on his teeth when he laughed, but would have paid little attention to the smaller, brown-faced, brown-bearded, grey-haired man, who lay back on the bench with his two hands clasped round his knee, and with his eyes fixed on the southern heavens, while he murmured to himself the lines of some ridiculous old Devonshire ballad, or replied in monosyllables to the rapid and eager talk of his friend.

Both men were good sailors, and they had need to be, for, although the sky above them was as blue and clear as the heart of a sapphire, and although the sunlight shone on the decks and the rigging, a strong north-easter had been blowing all the morning, and there was a considerable sea on. The far blue plain was whitened with the tumbling crests of the waves, that shone and sparkled in the sun; and ever and anon a volume of water would strike the *Clansman's* bow, rise high in the air with the shock, and fall in heavy showers over the forward decks. Sometimes, too, a wave caught her broadside, and sent a handful of spray over the two or three passengers who were safe in the stern; but the decks here remained silvery and white, for the sun and wind speedily dried up the traces of the sea-showers.

At length the taller of the young men came and sat down by his companion.

"How far to Stornoway, yet?"

"An hour."

"By Jove, what a distance! All day yesterday getting up from Oban to Skye, all last night churning our way up to Loch Gair, all to-day crossing to this outlandish island, that seems as far away as Iceland—and for what?"

"But don't you remember the moonlight last night, as we sailed by the Cuchullins? And the sunrise this morning as we lay in Loch Gair? Were not these worth coming for?"

"But that was not what you came for, my dear friend. No. You came to carry off this wonderful Miss Sheila of yours, and of course you wanted somebody to look on, and here I am, ready to carry the ladder, and the dark lantern, and the marriage-licence. I will saddle your steeds for you, and row you over lakes, and generally do anything to help you in so romantic an enterprise."

"It is very kind of you, Lavender," said the other, with a smile; "but such adventures are not for old fogies like me. They are the exclusive right of young fellows like you, who are tall and well-favoured, have plenty of money and good spirits, and have a way with you that all the world admires. Of course the bride will tread a measure with you. Of course all the bridesmaids would like to see you marry her. And of course she will taste the cup you offer her. Then a word in her ear—and away you go as if it were the most natural thing in the world, and as if the bridegroom was a despicable creature merely because God had only given him five feet six inches. But you couldn't have a Lochinvar five feet six."

The younger man blushed like a girl, and laughed

a little, and was evidently greatly pleased. Nay, in the height of his generosity he began to protest. He would not have his friend imagine that women cared only for stature and good looks. There were other qualities. He himself had observed the most singular conquests made by men who were not good-looking, but who had a certain fascination about them. His own experience of women was considerable, and he was quite certain that the best women, now—the sort of women whom a man would respect—the women who had brains——

And so forth, and so forth. The other listened quite gravely to these well-meant, kindly, blundering explanations; and only one who watched his face narrowly could have detected, in the brown eyes, a sort of amused consciousness of the intention of the amiable and ingenuous youth.

"Do you really mean to tell me, Ingram," continued Lavender, in his rapid and impetuous way, "do you mean to tell me that you are not in love with this Highland princess? For ages back you have talked of nothing but Sheila. How many an hour have I spent in clubs, up the river, down at the coast, everywhere, listening to your stories of Sheila, and your praises of Sheila, and your descriptions of Sheila. It was always Sheila, and again Sheila, and still again Sheila. But, do you know, either you exaggerated, or I failed to understand your descriptions; for the Sheila I came to construct out of your talk is a most incongruous and incomprehensible creature. First, Sheila knows about stone and lime and building; and then I suppose her to be a practical young woman, who is a sort of overseer to her father. But Sheila, again, is

romantic and mysterious, and believes in visions and dreams; and then I take her to be an affected school-miss. But then Sheila can throw a fly and play her sixteen-pounder, and Sheila can adventure upon the lochs in an open boat, managing the sail herself; and then I find her to be a tom-boy. Again, however, Sheila is shy and rarely speaks, but looks unutterable things with her soft and magnificent eyes; and what does that mean, but that she is an ordinary young lady, who has not been in society, and who is a little interesting, if a little stupid, while she is unmarried, and who, after marriage, calmly and complacently sinks into the dull domestic hind, whose only thought is of butcher's bills and perambulators."

This was a fairly long speech; but it was no longer than many which Frank Lavender was accustomed to utter when in the vein for talking. His friend and companion did not pay much heed. His hands were still clasped round his knee, his head leaning back; and all the answer he made was to repeat—apparently to himself—these not very pertinent lines—

"In Ockington, in Devonsheer,
My vather he lived vor many a yeer;
And I his son, with him did dwell,
To tend his sheep: 'twas doleful well.
Diddle-diddle!"

"You know, Ingram, it must be precious hard for a man who has to knock about in society, and take his wife with him, to have to explain to everybody that she is in reality a most unusual and gifted young person, and that she must not be expected to talk. It is all very well for him in his own house—that is to say, if he can preserve all the sentiment that made her shyness fine and wonderful before their marriage; but

a man owes a little to society, even in choosing a wife."

Another pause—

"It happened on a zartin day,
Four score o' the sheep they rinned astray,
Says vather to I, 'Jack, rin arter 'm, du!'
Sez I to vather, 'I'm darned if I do!'
Diddle-diddle!"

"Now you are the sort of man, I should think, who would never get careless about your wife. You would always believe about her what you believed at first; and I daresay you would live very happily in your own house if she was a decent sort of woman. But you would have to go out into society sometimes; and the very fact that you had not got careless—as many men would, leaving their wives to produce any sort of impression they might—would make you vexed that the world could not off-hand value your wife as you fancy she ought to be valued. Don't you see?"

This was the answer—

"Purvoket much at my rude tongue,
A dish o' brath at me he vlung,
Which so incensed me to wrath,
That I up an' knack un instantly to arth.
Diddle-diddle!"

"As for your Princess Sheila, I firmly believe you have some romantic notion of marrying her, and taking her up to London with you. If you seriously intend such a thing, I shall not argue with you. I shall praise her by the hour together; for I may have to depend on Mrs. Edward Ingram for my admission to your house. But if you only have the fancy as a fancy, consider what the result would be. You say she has never been to a school—that she has never had the companionship of a girl of her own age—that she has

never read a newspaper—that she has never been out of this island—and that almost her sole society has been that of her mother, who educated her, and tended her, and left her as ignorant of the real world as if she had lived all her life in a lighthouse. Goodness gracious! what a figure such a girl would cut in South Kensington——"

"My dear fellow," said Ingram, at last, "don't be absurd. You will soon see what are the relations between Sheila Mackenzie and me, and you will be satisfied. I marry her? Do you think I would take the child to London to show her its extravagance and shallow society, and break her heart with thinking of the sea, and of the rude islanders she knew, and of their hard and bitter struggle for life? No. I should not like to see my wild Highland doe shut up in one of your southern parks, among your tame fallow deer. She would look at them askance. She would separate herself from them; and by-and-by she would make one wild effort to escape—and kill herself. That is not the fate in store for our good little Sheila; so you need not make yourself unhappy about her or me.

"Now all ye young men, of every persuasion,
Never quarl wi' your vather upon any occasion;
For instead o' being better, you'll vind you'll be wuss,
For he'll kick you out o' doors, without a varden in your puss!
Diddle-diddle!"

Talking of Devonshire, how is that young American lady you met at Torquay in the spring?"

"There, now, is the sort of woman a man would be safe in marrying."

"And how?"

"Oh, well, you know," said Frank Lavender, "I mean the sort of woman who would do you credit—

hold her own in society, and that sort of thing. You must meet her some day. I tell you, Ingram, you will be delighted and charmed with her manners, and her grace, and the clever things she says—at least, everybody else is."

"Ah, well."

"You don't seem to care much for brilliant women," remarked the other, rather disappointed that his companion showed so little interest.

"Oh, yes, I like brilliant women very well. A clever woman is always a pleasanter companion than a clever man. But you were talking of the choice of a wife; and pertness in a girl, although it may be amusing at the time, may possibly become something else by-and-by. Indeed, I shouldn't advise a young man to marry an epigrammatist: for you see her shrewdness and smartness are generally the result of experiences in which *he* has had no share."

"There may be something in that," said Lavender, carelessly; "but of course, you know, with a widow it is different—and Mrs. Lorraine never does go in for the *ingénue*."

The pale blue cloud that had for some time been lying faintly along the horizon now came nearer and more near, until they could pick out something like the configuration of the island, its bays, and promontories, and mountains. The day seemed to become warmer as they got out of the driving wind of the Channel, and the heavy roll of the sea had so far subsided. Through comparatively calm water the great *Clansman* drove her way, until, on getting near the land, and under shelter of the Peninsula of Eye, the voyagers found themselves on a beautiful blue plain,

with the spacious harbour of Stornoway opening out before them. There, on the one side, lay a white and cleanly town, with its shops and quays and shipping. Above the bay in front stood a great grey castle, surrounded by pleasure-grounds, and terraces, and gardens; while, on the southern side, the harbour was overlooked by a semicircle of hills, planted with every variety of tree. The white houses, the blue bay, and the large grey building set amid green terraces and overlooked by wooded hills, formed a bright and lively little picture on this fresh and brilliant forenoon; and young Lavender, who had a quick eye for compositions, which he was always about to undertake, but which never appeared on canvas, declared enthusiastically that he would spend a day or two in Stornoway on his return from Borva, and take home with him some sketch of the place.

"And is Miss Sheila on the quay yonder?" he asked.

"Not likely," said Ingram. "It is a long drive *across* the island; and I suppose she would remain at *home* to look after our dinner in the evening."

"What? The wonderful Sheila look after our *dinner*? Has she visions among the pots and pans, and does she look unutterable things when she is peeling potatoes?"

Ingram laughed.

"There will be a pretty alteration in your tune, in a *couple* of days. You are sure to fall in love with her, and sigh desperately, for a week or two. You always do, when you meet a woman anywhere. But it won't hurt you much, and she won't know anything about it."

"I should rather like to fall in love with her, to see how furiously jealous you would become——However, here we are."

"And there is Mackenzie—the man with the big grey beard and the peaked cap—and he is talking to the Chamberlain of the Island."

"What does he get up on his waggonette for, instead of coming on board to meet you?"

"Oh, that is one of his little tricks," said Ingram, with a good-humoured smile. "He means to receive us in state, and impress you, a stranger, with his dignity. The good old fellow has a hundred harmless ways like that; and you must humour him. He has been accustomed to be treated *en roi*, you know."

"Then the papa of the mysterious princess is not perfect?"

"Perhaps I ought to tell you now that Mackenzie's oddest notion is that he has a wonderful skill in managing men, and in concealing the manner of his doing it. I tell you this that you mayn't laugh, and hurt him, when he is attempting something that he considers particularly crafty, and that a child could see through."

"But what is the aim of it all?"

"Oh, nothing."

"He does not do a little bet occasionally?"

"Oh, dear, no. He is the best and honestest fellow in the world; but it pleases him to fancy that he is profoundly astute, and that other people don't see the artfulness with which he reaches some little result that is not of the least consequence to anybody."

"It seems to me," remarked Mr. Lavender, with a

coolness and a shrewdness that rather surprised his companion, "that it would not be difficult to get the King of Borva to assume the honours of a papa-in-law."

The steamer was moored at last; the crowd of fishermen and loungers drew near to meet their friends who had come up from Glasgow—for there are few strangers, as a rule, arriving at Stornoway to whet the curiosity of the islanders—and the tall gillie who had been standing by Mackenzie's horses came on board to get the luggage of the young men.

"Well, Duncan," said the elder of them, "and how are you, and how is Mr. Mackenzie, and how is Miss Sheila? You haven't brought her with you, I see."

"But Miss Sheila is ferry well, whatever, Mr. Ingram, and it is a great day, this day, for her, tat you will be coming to the Lewis, and it wass tis morning she wass up at ta break o' day, and up ta hills to get some bits o' green things for ta rooms you will hef, Mr. Ingram. Ay, it iss a great day, tis day, for Miss Sheila."

"By Jove, they all rave about Sheila up in this quarter," said Lavender, giving Duncan a fishing-rod and a bag he had brought from the cabin. "I suppose in a week's time I shall begin and rave about her too. Look sharp, Ingram, and let us have audience of his Majesty."

The King of Borva fixed his eyes on young Lavender, and scanned him narrowly, as he was being introduced. His welcome of Ingram had been most gracious and friendly; but he received his companion with something of a severe politeness. He requested

him to take a seat beside him, so that he might see the country as they went across to Borva; and Lavender having done so, Ingram and Duncan got into the body of the waggonette, and the party drove off.

Passing through the clean and bright little town, Mackenzie suddenly pulled up his horses in front of a small shop, in the window of which some cheap bits of jewellery were visible. The man came out; and Mr. Mackenzie explained, with some care and precision, that he wanted a silver brooch of a particular sort. While the jeweller had returned to seek the article in question, Frank Lavender was gazing around him in some wonder at the appearance of so much civilization on this remote and rarely-visited island. Here were no haggard savages, unkempt and scantily clad, coming forth from their dens in the rocks to stare wildly at the strangers. On the contrary, there was a prevailing air of comfort and "bienness" about the people and their houses. He saw handsome girls, with coal-black hair and fresh complexions, who wore short and thick blue petticoats, with a scarlet tartan shawl wrapped round their bosom and fastened at the waist; stalwart, thick-set men, in loose blue jacket and trowsers, and scarlet cap, many of them with bushy red beards; and women of extraordinary breadth of shoulder, who carried enormous loads in a creel strapped on their back, while they employed their hands in contentedly knitting stockings as they passed along. But what was the purpose of these mighty loads of fish-bones they carried—burdens that would have appalled a railway porter of the South?

"You will see, sir," observed the King of Borva, in reply to Lavender's question, "there iss not much

of the phosphates in the grass of this island; and the cows they are mad to get the fish-bones to lick, and it iss many of them you cannot milk, unless you put the bones before them."

"But why do the lazy fellows lounging about there let the women carry those enormous loads?"

Mr. Mackenzie stared.

"Lazy fellows? They hef harder work than any you will know of in your country; and, besides the fishing, they will do the ploughing, and much of the farm-work. And iss the women to do none at all? That iss the nonsense that my daughter talks; but she has got it out of books, and what do they know how the poor people hef to live?"

At this moment the jeweller returned, with some half-dozen brooches displayed on a plate, and shining with all the brilliancy of cairn-gorm stones, polished silver, and variously-coloured pebbles.

"Now, John Mackintyre, this is a gentleman from London," said Mackenzie, regarding the jeweller sternly, "and he will know all apout such fine things, and you will not put a big price on them."

It was now Lavender's turn to stare; but he good-naturedly accepted the duties of referee, and eventually a brooch was selected and paid for, the price being six shillings. Then they drove on again.

"Sheila will know nothing of this—it will be a great surprise for her," said Mackenzie, almost to himself, as he opened the white box, and saw the glaring piece of jewellery lying on the white cotton.

"Good heavens, sir!" cried Frank Lavender, "you don't mean to say you bought that brooch for your daughter?"

"And why not?" said the King of Borva, in great surprise.

The young man perceived his mistake, grew considerably confused, and only said—

"Well, I should have thought that—that some small piece of gold jewellery, now, would be better suited for a young lady."

Mackenzie smiled shrewdly.

"I had something to go on. It wass Sheila herself was in Stornoway three weeks ago, and she wass wanting to buy a brooch for a young girl who has come down to us from Suainabost, and is very useful in the kitchen, and it wass a brooch just like this one she gave to her."

"Yes, to a kitchenmaid," said the young man, meekly.

"But Mairi is Sheila's cousin," said Mackenzie, with continued surprise.

"Lavender does not understand Highland ways yet, Mr. Mackenzie," said Ingram, from behind. "You know we in the South have different fashions. Our servants are nearly always strangers to us—not relations and companions."

"Oh, I hef peen in London myself," said Mackenzie, in somewhat of an injured tone; and then he added, with a touch of self-satisfaction, "and I hef been in Paris too."

"And Miss Sheila, has she been in London?" asked Lavender, feigning ignorance.

"She has never been out of the Lewis."

"But don't you think the education of a young lady should include some little experience of travelling?"

"Sheila, she will be educated quite enough; and is she going to London or Paris without me?"

"You might take her."

"I have too much to do on the island now, and Sheila has much to do; I do not think she will ever see any of those places, and she will not be much the worse."

Two young men off for their holidays—a brilliant day shining all around them—the sweet air of the sea and the moorland blowing about them: this little party that now drove away from Stornoway ought to have been in the best of spirits. And, indeed, the young fellow who sat beside Mackenzie was bent on pleasing his host, by praising everything he saw. He praised the gallant little horses that whirled them past the plantations and out into the open country. He praised the rich black peat that was visible in long lines and heaps, where the townspeople were slowly eating into the moorland. Then all these traces of occupation were left behind, and the travellers were alone in the untenanted heart of the island, where the only sounds audible were the humming of insects in the sunlight, and the falling of streams. Away in the south the mountains were of a silvery and transparent blue. Nearer at hand the rich reds and browns of the moorland softened into a tender and beautiful green on nearing the margins of the lakes; and these stretches of water were now as fair and bright as the sky above them, and were scarcely ruffled by the moor-fowl moving out from the green rushes. Still nearer at hand, great masses of white rock lay embedded in the soft soil; and what could have harmonized better with the rough and silver-grey

surface than the patches of rose-red bell-heather that grew up in their clefts, or hung over their summits? The various and beautiful colours around seemed to tingle with light and warmth as the clear sun shone on them, and the keen mountain air blew over them; and the King of Borva was so far thawed by the enthusiasm of his companions, that he regarded the far country with a pleased smile, as if the enchanted land belonged to him, and as if the wonderful colours, and the exhilarating air, and the sweet perfumes, were of his own creation.

Mr. Mackenzie did not know much about tints and hues; but he believed what he heard; and it was perhaps, after all, not very surprising that a gentleman from London, who had skill of pictures and other delicate matters, should find strange marvels in a common stretch of moor, with a few lakes here and there, and some lines of mountain only good for shielings. It was not for him to check the raptures of his guest. He began to be friendly with the young man; and could not help regarding him as a more cheerful companion than his neighbour Ingram, who would sit by your side for an hour at a time, without breaking the monotony of the horses' tramp with a single remark. He had formed a poor opinion of Lavender's physique, from the first glimpse he had of his white fingers and girl-like complexion; but surely a man who had such a vast amount of good spirits, and such a rapidity of utterance, must have something corresponding to these qualities in substantial bone and muscle. There was something pleasing and ingenuous, too, about this flow of talk. Men who had arrived at years of wisdom, and knew how to study and use their fellows, were

not to be led into these betrayals of their secret opinions; but for a young man—what could be more pleasing than to see him lay open his soul to the observant eye of a master of men? Mackenzie began to take a great fancy to young Lavender.

"Why," said Lavender, with a fine colour mantling in his cheeks, as the wind caught them on a higher portion of the road, "I had heard of Lewis as a most bleak and desolate island—flat moorland and lake—without a hill to be seen. And everywhere I see hills; and yonder are great mountains, which I hope to get nearer before we leave."

"We have mountains in this island," remarked Mackenzie, slowly, as he kept his eye on his companion, "we have mountains in this island sixteen thousand feet high."

Lavender looked sufficiently astonished; and the old man was pleased. He paused for a moment or two, and said—

"But this iss the way of it: you will see that the middle of the mountains it has all been washed away by the weather, and you will only have the sides now dipping one way and the other at each side o' the island. But it iss a very clever man in Stornoway will tell me that you can make out what wass the height o' the mountain, by watching the dipping of the rocks on each side; and it iss an older country, this island, than any you will know of, and there were the mountains sixteen thousand feet high long before all this country, and all Scotland and England, wass covered with ice."

The young man was very desirous to show his interest in this matter; but did not know very well how.

At last, he ventured to ask whether there were any fossils in the blocks of gneiss that were scattered over the moorland.

"Fossils?" said Mackenzie. "Oh, I will not care much about such small things. If you will ask Sheila, she will tell you all about it, and about the small things she finds growing on the hills. That iss not of much consequence to me; but I will tell you what is the best thing the island grows—it is good girls and strong men—men that can go to the fishing, and come back to plough the fields, and cut the peat, and build the houses, and leave the women to look after the fields and the gardens when they go back again to the fisheries. But it is the old people—they are ferry cunning, and they will not put their money in the bank at Stornoway, but will hide it away about the house, and then they will come to Sheila and ask for money to put a pane of glass in their house. And she has promised that to everyone who will make a window in the wall of their house; and she is very simple with them, and does not understand the old people that tell lies. But when I hear of it, I say nothing to Sheila—she will know nothing about it—but I hef a watch put upon the people, and it wass only yesterday I will take back two shillings she gave to an old woman of Borvabost, that told many lies. What does a young thing know of these old people? She will know nothing at all, and it iss better for some one else to look after them, but not to speak one word of it to her."

"It must require great astuteness to manage a primitive people like that," said young Lavender with an air of conviction; and the old man eagerly and

proudly assented, and went on to tell of the manifold diplomatic arts he used in reigning over his small kingdom, and how his subjects lived in blissful ignorance that this controlling power was being exercised.

They were startled by an exclamation from Ingram, who called to Mackenzie to pull up the horses, just as they were passing over a small bridge.

"Look there, Lavender, did you ever see salmon jumping like that? Look at the size of them!"

"Oh, it iss nothing," said Mackenzie, driving on again; "where you will see the salmon, it is in the Narrows of Loch Roag, where they come into the rivers, and the tide is low. Then you will see them jumping; and if the water wass too low for a long time, they will die in hundreds and hundreds."

"But what makes them jump before they get into the rivers?"

Old Mackenzie smiled a crafty smile, as if he had found out all the ways and the secrets of the salmon.

"They will jump to look about them—that iss all."

"Do you think a salmon can see where he is going?"

"And maybe you will explain this to me, then," said the King, with a compassionate air; "how iss it the salmon will try to jump over some stones in the river, and he will see he cannot go over them; but does he fall straight down on the stones and kill himself? Neffer—no, neffer. He will get back to the pool he left by turning in the air—that is what I have seen hundreds of times myself."

"Then they must be able to fly as well as see in the air."

"You may say about it what you will please; but that is what I know—that is what I know ferry well myself."

"And I should think there were not many people in the country who knew more about salmon than you," said Frank Lavender. "And I hear, too, that your daughter is a great fisher."

But this was a blunder. The old man frowned.

"Who will tell you such nonsense? Sheila has gone out many times with Duncan, and he will put a rod in her hands—yes—and she will have caught a fish or two—but it iss not a story to tell. My daughter she will have plenty to do about the house, without any of such nonsense. You will expect to find us all savages, with such stories of nonsense."

"I am sure not," said Lavender, warmly; "I have been very much struck with the civilization of the island, so far as I have seen it; and I can assure you I have always heard of Miss Sheila as a singularly accomplished young lady."

"Yes," said Mackenzie, somewhat mollified, "Sheila has been well brought up—she is not a fisherman's lass, running about wild, and catching the salmon. I cannot listen to such nonsense—and it iss Duncan will tell it."

"I can assure you, no. I have never spoken to Duncan. The fact is, Ingram mentioned that your daughter had caught a salmon or two as a tribute to her skill, you know."

"Oh, I know it wass Duncan," said Mackenzie, with a deeper frown coming over his face. "I will

hef some means taken to stop Duncan from talking such nonsense."

The young man—knowing nothing as yet of the child-like obedience paid to the King of Borva by his islanders—thought to himself—

"Well, you are a very strong and self-willed old gentleman, but if I were you, I should not meddle much with that tall keeper with the eagle beak and the grey eyes. I should not like to be a stag, and know that that fellow was watching me somewhere, with a rifle in his hands."

At length they came upon the brow of the hill overlooking Garra-na-hina* and the panorama of the western lochs and mountains. Down there on the side of the hill was the small inn, with its little patch of garden; then a few moist meadows leading over to the estuary of the Black River; and beyond that an illimitable prospect of heathy undulations rising into the mighty peaks of Cracabhal, Mealasabhal, and Suainabhal. Then on the right, leading away out to the as yet invisible Atlantic, lay the blue plain of Loch Roag, with a margin of yellow sea-weed along its shores, where the rocks revealed themselves at low water, and with a multitude of large, variegated, and verdant islands which hid from sight the still greater Borva beyond.

They stopped to have a glass of whisky at Garra-na-hina, and Mackenzie got down from the waggonette and went into the inn.

"And this is a Highland loch!" said Lavender, turning to his companion from the South. "It is an enchanted sea—you could fancy yourself in the Pacific,

* Literally *Gearaidh-na'h-Aimhne*—"the cutting of the river."

if only there were some palm-trees on the shores of the islands. No wonder you took for an Eve any sort of woman you met in such a Paradise."

"You seem to be thinking a good deal about that young lady."

"Well, who would not wish to make the acquaintance of a pretty girl—especially when you have plenty of time on your hands, and nothing to do but pay her little attentions, you know, and so forth, as being the daughter of your host?"

There was no particular answer to such an incoherent question; but Ingram did not seem so well pleased as he had been with the prospect of introducing his friend to the young Highland girl whose praises he had been reciting for many a day.

However, they drank their whisky, drove on to Callernish, and here paused for a minute or two to show the stranger a series of large so-called Druidical stones which occupy a small plateau overlooking the loch. Could anything have been more impressive than the sight of these solitary grey pillars placed on this bit of table-land high over the sea, and telling of a race that vanished ages ago and left the surrounding plains, and hills, and shores a wild and untenanted solitude? But somehow Lavender did not care to remain among those voiceless monuments of a forgotten past. He said he would come and sketch them some other day. He praised the picture all around; and then came back to the stretch of ruffled blue water lying at the base of the hill. "Where was Mr. Mackenzie's boat?" he asked.

They left the high plain, with its *Tuirsachan*,* or

* Another name given by the islanders to those stones is *Fir-bhreige*,

Stones of Mourning, and descended to the side of the loch. In a few moments, Duncan, who had been disposing of the horses and the waggonette, overtook them, got ready the boat, and presently they were cutting asunder the bright blue plain of summer waves.

At last they were nearing the King of Borva's island. The white foam hissed down the side of the open boat. The sun burned hot on the brown sail. Far away over the shining plain the salmon were leaping into the air, catching a quick glint of silver on their scales before they splashed again into the water. Half-a-dozen sea-pyes, with their beautiful black and white plumage, and scarlet beaks and feet, flew screaming out from the rocks, and swept in rapid circles above the boat. A long flight of solan-geese could just be seen slowly sailing along the western horizon. As the small craft got out towards the sea, the breeze freshened slightly, and she lay over somewhat, as the brine-laden winds caught her, and tingled on the cheeks of her passengers from the softer South. Finally, as the great channel widened out, and the various smaller islands disappeared behind, Ingram touched his companion on the shoulder, looked over to a long and low line of rock and hill, and said—

"Borva!"

And this was Borva!—nothing visible but an indefinite extent of rocky shore, with here and there a bay of white sand, and over that a table-land of green pasture, apparently uninhabited.

"There are not many people on the island," said

"false men." Both names, "False Men" and "The Mourners," should be of some interest to antiquarians, for they will suit pretty nearly any theory.

Lavender, who seemed rather disappointed with the look of the place.

"There are three hundred," said Mackenzie, with the air of one who had experienced the difficulties of ruling over three hundred islanders.

He had scarcely spoken, when his attention was called by Duncan to some object that the gillie had been regarding for some minutes back.

"Yes, it iss Miss Sheila," said Duncan.

A sort of flash of expectation passed over Lavender's face, and he sprang to his feet. Ingram laughed. Did the foolish youth fancy he could see half as far as this grey-eyed, eagle-faced man, who had now sunk into his accustomed seat by the mast? There was nothing visible to ordinary eyes but a speck of a boat, with a single sail up, which was apparently, in the distance, running in for Borva.

"Ay, ay, ay," said Mackenzie, in a vexed way, "it is Sheila, true enough; and what will she do out in the boat at this time, when she wass to be at home to receive the gentlemen that hef come all the way from London?"

"Well, Mr. Mackenzie," said Lavender, "I should be sorry to think that our coming had interfered in any way whatever with your daughter's amusements."

"Amusements!" said the old man, with a look of surprise. "It iss not amusements she will go for—that is no amusements for her. It is for some teffle of a purpose she will go, when it is the house that is the proper place for her, with friends coming from so great a journey."

Presently it became clear that a race between the

two boats was inevitable, both of them making for the same point. Mackenzie would take no notice of such a thing; but there was a grave smile on Duncan's face, and something like a look of pride in his keen eyes.

"There iss no one, not one," he said, almost to himself, "will take her in better than Miss Sheila—not one in ta island. And it wass me tat learnt her every bit o' ta steering about Borva."

The strangers could now make out that in the other boat there were two girls, one seated in the stern, the other by the mast. Ingram took out his handkerchief and waved it; a similar token of recognition was floated out from the other vessel. But Mackenzie's boat presently had the better of the wind, and slowly drew on ahead; until, when her passengers landed on the rude stone quay, they found the other and smaller craft still some little distance off.

Lavender paid little attention to his luggage. He let Duncan do with it what he liked. He was watching the small boat coming in, and getting a little impatient, and perhaps a little nervous, in waiting for a glimpse of the young lady in the stern. He could vaguely make out that she had an abundance of dark hair looped up; that she wore a small straw hat with a short white feather in it; and that for the rest, she seemed to be habited entirely in some rough and close-fitting costume of dark blue. Or was there a glimmer of a band of rose-red round her neck?

The small boat was cleverly run alongside the jetty; Duncan caught her bow and held her fast, and Miss Sheila, with a heavy string of lythe in her right

hand, stepped, laughing and blushing, on to the quay. Ingram was there. She dropped the fish on the stones, and took his two hands in hers, and, without uttering a word, looked a glad welcome into his face. It was a face capable of saying unwritten things—fine and delicate in form, and yet full of an abundance of health and good spirits that shone in the deep grey-blue eyes. Lavender's first emotion was one of surprise that he should have heard this handsome, well-knit, and proud-featured girl called "little Sheila," and spoken of in a pretty and caressing way. He thought there was something almost majestic in her figure, in the poising of her head, and the outline of her face. But presently he began to perceive some singular suggestions of sensitiveness and meekness in the low, sweet brow, in the short and exquisitely-curved upper-lip, and in the look of the tender blue eyes, which had long black eyelashes to give them a peculiar and indefinable charm. All this he noticed hastily and timidly as he heard Ingram, who still held the girl's hands in his, saying—

"Well, Sheila, and you haven't quite forgotten me? And you are grown such a woman now—why, I mustn't call you Sheila any more, I think—but let me introduce to you my friend, who has come all the way from London to see all the wonderful things of Borva."

If there was any embarrassment or blushing during that simple ceremony, it was not on the side of the Highland girl; for she frankly shook hands with him, and said—

"And are you very well?"

The second impression which Lavender gathered

from her was, that nowhere in the world was English pronounced so beautifully as in the island of Lewis. The gentle intonation with which she spoke was so tender and touching—the slight dwelling on the *e* in "very," and "well" seemed to have such a sound of sincerity about it, that he could have fancied he had been a friend of hers for a lifetime. And if she said "ferry" for "very," what then? It was the most beautiful English he had ever heard.

The party now moved off towards the shore, above the long white curve of which Mackenzie's house was visible. The old man himself led the way, and had, by his silence, apparently not quite forgiven his daughter for having been absent from home when his guests arrived.

"Now, Sheila," said Ingram, "tell me all about yourself; what have you been doing?"

"This morning?" said the girl, walking beside him with her hand laid on his arm, and with the happiest look on her face.

"This morning, to begin with. Did you catch those fish yourself?"

"Oh, no, there was no time for that. And it was Mairi and I saw a boat coming in, and it was going to Mevaig, but we overtook it, and got some of the fish, and we thought we should be back before you came. However, it is no matter since you are here. And you have been very well? And did you see any difference in Stornoway when you came over?"

Lavender began to think that "Styornoway" sounded ever so much more pleasant than mere Stornoway.

"We had not a minute to wait in Stornoway. But

tell me, Sheila, all about Borva and yourself—that is better than Stornoway. How are your schools getting on? And have you bribed or frightened all the children into giving up Gaelic yet? How is John the Piper—and does the Free Church minister still complain of him? And have you caught any more wild ducks and tamed them? And are there any grey geese up at Loch-an-Eilean?"

"Oh, that is too many at once," said Sheila, laughing. "But I am afraid your friend will find Borva very lonely and dull. There is not much here at all —for all the lads are away at the Caithness fishing. And you should have shown him all about Stornoway, and taken him up to the Castle, and the beautiful gardens."

"He has seen all sorts of castles, Sheila, and all sorts of gardens in every part of the world. He has seen everything to be seen in the great cities and countries that are only names to you. He has travelled in France, Italy, Russia, Germany, and seen all the big towns that you hear of in history."

"That is what I should like to do, if I were a man," said Sheila; "and many and many a time I wish I had been a man, that I could go to the fishing, and work in the fields, and then, when I had seen enough, go away and see other countries and strange people."

"But if you were a man, I should not have come all the way from London to see you," said Ingram, patting the hand that lay on his arm.

"But if I were a man," said the girl, quite frankly, "I should go up to London to see you."

Mackenzie smiled grimly, and said—

"Sheila, it is nonsense you will talk."

At this moment Sheila turned round, and said—

"Oh, we have forgotten poor Mairi. Mairi, why did you not leave the fish for Duncan—they are too heavy for you. I will carry them to the house."

But Lavender sprang forward, and insisted on taking possession of the thick cord with its considerable weight of lythe.

"This is my cousin Mairi," said Sheila; and forthwith the young, fair-faced, timid-eyed girl shook hands with the gentlemen, and said—just as if she had been watching Sheila—

"And are you ferry well, sir!"

For the rest of the way up to the house, Lavender walked by the side of Sheila; and as the string of lythe had formed the introduction to their talk, it ran pretty much upon natural history. In about five minutes she had told him more about sea-birds and fish than ever he knew in his life; and she wound up this information by offering to take him out on the following morning, that he might himself catch some lythe.

"But I am a wretchedly bad fisherman, Miss Mackenzie," he said. "It is some years since I tried to throw a fly."

"Oh, there is no need for good fishing when you catch lythe," she said, earnestly. "You will see Mr. Ingram catch them. It is only a big white fly you will need, and a long line, and when the fish takes the fly, down he goes—a great depth. Then when you have got him, and he is killed, you must cut the sides, as you see that is done, and string him to a rope and trail him behind the boat all the way home.

If you do not do that, it iss no use at all to eat. But if you like the salmon-fishing, my papa will teach you that. There is no one," she added, proudly, "can catch salmon like my papa—not even Duncan—and the gentlemen who come in the autumn to Stornoway, they are quite surprised when my papa goes to fish with them."

"I suppose he is a good shot, too," said the young man, amused to notice the proud way in which the girl spoke of her father.

"Oh, he can shoot anything. He will shoot a seal, if he comes up but for one moment above the water; and all the birds—he will get you all the birds, if you will wish to take any away with you. We have no deer on the island—it is too small for that; but in the Lewis and in Harris there are many, many thousands of deer, and my papa has many invitations when the gentlemen come up in the autumn, and if you look in the game-book of the lodges, you will see there is not anyone who has shot so many deer as my papa—not anyone whatever."

At length they reached the building of dark and rude stone-work, with its red coping, its spacious porch, and its small enclosure of garden in front. Lavender praised the flowers in this enclosure—he guessed they were Sheila's particular care; but, in truth, there was nothing rare or delicate among the plants growing in this exposed situation. There were a few clusters of large yellow pansies, a calceolaria or two, plenty of wallflower, some clove pinks, and an abundance of sweet-william in all manner of colours. But the chief beauty of the small garden was a magnificent tree-fuchsia which grew in front of one of

the windows, and was covered with deep rose-red flowers set amid its small and deep-green leaves. For the rest, a bit of honeysuckle was trained up one side of the porch; and at the small wooden gate there were two bushes of sweet-brier, that filled the warm air with fragrance.

Just before entering the house, the two strangers turned to have a look at the spacious landscape lying all around, in the perfect calm of a summer day. And lo! before them there was but a blinding mass of white that glared upon their eyes, and caused them to see the far sea, and the shores, and the hills as but faint shadows appearing through a silvery haze. A thin fleece of cloud lay across the sun, but the light was, nevertheless, so intense that the objects near at hand—a disused boat lying bottom upwards, an immense anchor of foreign make, and some such things —seemed to be as black as night, as they lay on the warm road. But when the eye got beyond the house and the garden, and the rough hillside leading down to Loch Roag, all the world appeared to be a blaze of calm, silent, and luminous heat. Suainabhal and his brother mountains were only as clouds in the south. Along the western horizon, the portion of the Atlantic that could be seen, lay like a silent lake under a white sky. To get any touch of colour, they had to turn eastward, and there the sunlight faintly fell on the green shores of Borva, on the Narrows of Loch Roag, and the loose red sail of a solitary smack that was slowly coming round a headland. They could hear the sound of the long oars. A pale line of shadow lay in the wake of the boat; but otherwise the black hull and the red sail seemed to be coming

through a plain of molten silver. When the young men turned to go into the house, the hall seemed a cavern of impenetrable darkness, and there was a flush of crimson light dancing before their eyes.

When Ingram had had his room pointed out, Lavender followed him into it, and shut the door.

"By Jove, Ingram," he said, with a singular light of enthusiasm on his handsome face, "what a beautiful voice that girl has—I have never heard anything so soft and musical in all my life—and then, when she smiles, what perfect teeth she has—and then, you know, there is an appearance, a style, a grace, about her figure—— But, I say, do you seriously mean to tell me you are not in love with her?"

"Of course I am not," said the other, impatiently, as he was busily engaged with his portmanteau.

"Then let me give you a word of information," said the younger man; "she is in love with you."

Ingram rose, with some little touch of vexation on his face.

"Look here, Lavender. I am going to talk to you seriously. I wish you wouldn't fancy that everyone is in that condition of simmering love-making you delight in. You never were in love, I believe; but you are always fancying yourself in love, and writing very pretty verses about it, and painting very pretty heads. I like the verses and the paintings well enough, however they are come by; but don't mislead yourself into believing that you know anything whatever of a real and serious passion by having engaged in all sorts of imaginative and semi-poetical dreams. It is a much more serious thing than that, mind you, when it comes to a man, as I trust you will find out. But, for heaven's sake,

don't attribute any of that sort of sentimental make-believe to either Sheila Mackenzie or myself. We are not romantic folks. We have no imaginative gifts whatever; but we are very glad, you know, to be attentive and grateful to those who have. The fact is, I don't think it quite fair——"

"Let us suppose I am lectured enough," said the other, somewhat bluntly. "I suppose I am as good a judge of the character of a woman as most other men, although I am no great student, and have no hard and dried rules of philosophy at my fingers' ends. Perhaps, however, one may learn more by mixing with other people, and going out into the world, than by sitting in a room with a dozen books and persuading oneself that men and women are to be studied in that fashion."

"Go away, you stupid boy, and unpack your portmanteau, and don't quarrel with me," said Ingram, putting out on the table some things he had brought for Sheila; "and if you are friendly with Sheila, and treat her like a human being, instead of trying to put a lot of romance and sentiment about her, she will teach you more than you could learn in a hundred drawing-rooms in a thousand years."

CHAPTER III.

There was a King in Thule.

He never took that advice. He had already transformed Sheila into a heroine during the half-hour of their stroll from the beach and around the house. Not that he fell in love with her at first sight, or anything even approaching to that. He merely made her the

central figure of a little speculative romance, as he had made many another woman before. Of course, in these little fanciful dramas, written along the sky-line, as it were, of his life, he invariably pictured himself as the fitting companion of the fair creature he saw there. Who but himself could understand the sentiment of her eyes, and teach her little love-ways, and express unbounded admiration of her? More than one practical young woman, indeed, in certain circles of London society, had been informed by her friends that Mr. Lavender was dreadfully in love with her; and had been much surprised, after this confirmation of her suspicions, that he sought no means of bringing the affair to a reasonable and sensible issue. He did not even amuse himself by flirting with her, as men would willingly do who could not be charged with any serious purpose whatever. His devotion was more mysterious and remote. A rumour would get about that Mr. Lavender had finished another of those charming heads in pastel, which, at a distance, reminded one of Greuze, and that Lady So-and-so, who had bought it forthwith, had declared that it was the image of this young lady, who was partly puzzled and partly vexed by the incomprehensible conduct of her reputed admirer. It was the fashion, in these social circles, to buy those heads of Lavender, when he chose to paint them. He had achieved a good reputation by them. The good people liked to have a genius in their own set, whom they had discovered, and who was only to be appreciated by persons of exceptional taste and penetration. Lavender, the uninitiated were assured, was a most cultivated and brilliant young man. He had composed some charming songs. He

had written, from time to time, some quite delightful little poems, over which fair eyes had grown full and liquid. Who had not heard of the face that he painted for a certain young lady, whom everyone expected him to marry?

The young man escaped a great deal of the ordinary consequences of this petting; but not all. He was at bottom really true-hearted, frank, and generous —generous even to an extreme; but he had acquired a habit of producing striking impressions which dogged and perverted his every action and speech. He disliked losing a few shillings at billiards, but he did not mind losing a few pounds: the latter was good for a story. Had he possessed any money to invest in shares, he would have been irritated by small rises or small falls; but he would have been vain of a big rise, and he would have regarded a big fall with equanimity, as placing him in a dramatic light. The exaggerations produced by this habit of his, fostered strange delusions in the minds of people who did not know him very well; and sometimes the practical results—in the way of expected charities or what not—amazed him. He could not understand why people should have made such mistakes, and resented them as an injustice. Perhaps, if the young fellow had not been possessed at bottom of many sound qualities, the consequences of this social petting would have been more serious.

And as they sat at dinner on this still, brilliant evening in summer, it was Sheila's turn to be clothed in the garments of romance. Her father, with his great grey beard and heavy brow, became the King of Thule, living in this solitary house overlooking the

sea, and having memories of a dead sweetheart. His daughter, the Princess, had the glamour of a thousand legends dwelling in her beautiful eyes; and when she walked by the shores of the Atlantic, that were now getting yellow under the sunset, what strange and unutterable thoughts must appear in the wonder of her face! He remembered no more how he had pulled to pieces Ingram's praises of Sheila. What had become of the "ordinary young lady, who would be a little interesting, if a little stupid, before marriage, and, after marriage, sink into the dull, domestic hind?" There could be no doubt that Sheila often sat silent for a considerable time, with her eyes fixed on her father's face when he spoke, or turning to look at some other speaker. Had Lavender now been asked if this silence had not a trifle of dulness in it, he would have replied by asking if there were dulness in the stillness and the silence of the sea. He grew to regard her calm and thoughtful look as a sort of spell; and if you had asked him what Sheila was like, he would have answered by saying that there was moonlight in her face.

The room, too, in which this mystic Princess sat, was strange and wonderful. There were no doors visible; for the four walls were throughout covered by a paper of foreign manufacture, representing spacious Tyrolese landscapes, and incidents of the chase. When Lavender had at first entered this chamber, his eye had been shocked by these coarse and prominent pictures—by the green rivers, the blue lakes, and the snow peaks that rose above certain ruddy chalets. There a chamois was stumbling down a ravine, and there an operatic peasant, some eight or ten inches in

actual length, was pointing a gun. The large figures, the coarse colours, the impossible scenes — all this looked, at first sight, to be in the worst possible taste; and Lavender was convinced that Sheila had nothing to do with the introduction of this abominable decoration. But somehow, when he turned to the line of ocean that was visible from the window, to the lonely shores of the island, and the monotony of colours showing in the still picture without, he began to fancy that there might be a craving up in these latitudes for some presentation, however rude and glaring, of the richer and more variegated life of the South. The figures and mountains on the walls became less prominent. He saw no incongruity in a whole chalet giving way, and allowing Duncan, who waited at table, to bring forth from this aperture to the kitchen, a steaming dish of salmon, while he spoke some words in Gaelic to the servants at the other end of the tube. He even forgot to be surprised at the appearance of little Mairi, with whom he had shaken hands a little while before, coming round the table with potatoes. He did not, as a rule, shake hands with servant-maids, but was not this fair-haired, wistful-eyed girl some relative, friend, or companion of Sheila's; and had he not already begun to lose all perception of the incongruous or the absurd in the strange pervading charm with which Sheila's presence filled the place?

He suddenly found Mackenzie's deep-set eyes fixed upon him, and became aware that the old man had been mysteriously announcing to Ingram that there were more political movements abroad than people fancied. Sheila sat still and listened to her

father as he expounded these things, and showed that, although at a distance, he could perceive the signs of the times. Was it not incumbent, moreover, on a man who had to look after a number of poor and simple folks, that he should be on the alert?

"It iss not bekass you will live in London you will know everything," said the King of Borva, with a certain significance in his tone. "There iss many things a man does not see at his feet, that another man will see who is a good way off. The International, now——"

He glanced furtively at Lavender.

"—I hef been told there will be agents going out every day to all parts of this country and other countries, and they will hef plenty of money to live like gentlemen, and get among the poor people, and fill their minds with foolish nonsense about a revolution. Oh, yes, I hear about it all, and there iss many members of Parliament in it, and it iss every day they will get farther and farther, all working hard, though no one sees them who does not understand to be on the watch."

Here, again, the young man received a quiet, scrutinizing glance; and it began to dawn upon him, to his infinite astonishment, that Mackenzie half suspected him of being an emissary of the International. In the case of any other man, he would have laughed, and paid no heed; but how could he permit Sheila's father to regard him with any such suspicion?

"Don't you think, sir," he said, boldly, "that these Internationalists are a lot of incorrigible idiots?"

As if a shrewd observer of men and motives were

to be deceived by such a protest! Mackenzie regarded him with increased suspicion, although he endeavoured to conceal the fact that he was watching the young man from time to time. Lavender saw all the favour he had won during the day disappearing; and moodily wondered when he should have a chance of explanation.

After dinner, they went outside and sat down on a bench in the garden, and the men lit their cigars. It was a cool and pleasant evening. The sun had gone down in red fire behind the Atlantic, and there was still left a rich glow of crimson in the west, while overhead, in the pale yellow of the sky, some filmy clouds of rose-colour lay motionless. How calm was the sea out there, and the whiter stretch of water coming into Loch Roag! The cool air of the twilight was scented with sweet-brier. The wash of the ripples along the coast could be heard in the stillness. It was a time for lovers to sit by the sea, careless of the future or the past.

But why would this old man keep prating of his political prophecies? Lavender asked of himself. Sheila had spoken scarcely a word all the evening; and of what interest could it be to her to listen to theories of revolution, and the dangers besetting our hot-headed youth? She merely stood by the side of her father, with her hand on his shoulder. He noticed, however, that she paid particular attention whenever Ingram spoke: and he wondered whether she perceived that Ingram was partly humouring the old man, at the same time that he was pleasing himself with a series of monologues, interrupted only by his cigar.

"That is true enough, Mr. Mackenzie," Ingram

would say, lying back with his two hands clasped round his knee, as usual; "you've got to be careful of the opinions that are spread abroad, even in Borva, where not much danger is to be expected. But I don't suppose our young men are more destructive in their notions than young men always have been. You know, every young fellow starts in life by knocking down all the beliefs he finds before him, and then he spends the rest of his life in setting them up again. It is only after some years he gets to know that all the wisdom of the world lies in the old commonplaces he once despised. He finds that the old familiar ways are the best, and he sinks into being a commonplace person, with much satisfaction to himself. My friend Lavender, now, is continually charging me with being commonplace. I admit the charge. I have drifted back into all the old ways and beliefs —about religion and marriage, and patriotism, and what not—that ten years ago I should have treated with ridicule."

"Suppose the process continues," suggested Lavender.

"Suppose it does," continued Ingram, carelessly. "Ten years hence I may be proud to become a vestryman, and have the most anxious care about the administration of the rates. I shall be looking after the drainage of houses, and the treatment of paupers, and the management of Sunday schools——But all this is an invasion of your province, Sheila," he suddenly added, looking up to her.

The girl laughed, and said—

"Then I have been commonplace from the beginning?"

Ingram was about to make all manner of protests and apologies, when Mackenzie said—

"Sheila, it wass time you will go indoors, if you have nothing about your head. Go in and sing a song to us, and we will listen to you; and not a sad song, but a good merry song. These teffles of the fishermen, it iss always drownings they will sing about, from the morning till the night."

Was Sheila about to sing—in this clear, strange twilight, while they sat there and watched the yellow moon come up behind the southern hills? Lavender had heard so much of her singing of those fishermen's ballads, that he could think of nothing more to add to the enchantment of this wonderful night. But he was disappointed. The girl put her hand on her father's head, and reminded him that she had had her big greyhound Bras imprisoned all the afternoon, that she had to go down to Borvabost with a message for some people who were leaving by the boat in the morning, and would the gentlemen therefore excuse her not singing to them for this one evening?

"But you cannot go away down to Borvabost by yourself, Sheila," said Ingram. "It will be dark before you return."

"It will not be darker than this all the night through," said the girl.

"But I hope you will let us go with you," said Lavender, rather anxiously; and she assented with a gracious smile, and went to fetch the great deerhound that was her constant companion.

And lo! he found himself walking with a Princess in this wonder-land, through the magic twilight that prevails in northern latitudes. Mackenzie and Ingram

had gone on in front. The large deerhound, after regarding him attentively, had gone to its mistress's side, and remained closely there. Lavender could scarcely believe his ears that the girl was talking to him lightly and frankly, as though she had known him for years, and was telling him of all her troubles with the folks at Borvabost, and of those poor people whom she was now going to see. No sooner did he understand that they were emigrants, and that they were going to Glasgow before leaving finally for America, than in quite an honest and enthusiastic fashion he began to bewail the sad fate of such poor wretches as have to forsake their native land, and to accuse the aristocracy of the country of every act of selfishness, and to charge the Government with a shameful indifference. But Sheila brought him up suddenly. In the gentlest fashion she told him what she knew of these poor people, and how emigration affected them, and so forth, until he was ready to curse the hour in which he had blundered into taking a side on a question about which he cared nothing and knew less.

"But some other time," continued Sheila, "I will tell you what we do here, and I will show you a great many letters I have from friends of mine who have gone to Greenock, and to New York, and Canada. Oh yes, it is very bad for the old people—they never get reconciled to the change—never; but it is very good for the young people, and they are glad of it, and are much better off than they were here. You will see how proud they are of the better clothes they have, and of good food, and money to put in the bank; and how could they get that in the highlands, where the land is so poor that a small piece is of no

use, and they have not money to rent the large sheep-farms. It is very bad to have people go away—it is very hard on many of them—but what can they do? The piece of ground that was very good for the one family, that is expected to keep the daughters when they marry, and the sons when they marry, and then there are five or six families to live on it. And hard work—that will not do much, with very bad land, and the bad weather we have here. The people get down-hearted when they have their crops spoiled by the long rain, and they cannot get their peats dried; and very often the fishing turns out bad, and they have no money at all to carry on the farm. But now you will see Borvabost."

Lavender had to confess that this wonderful Princess would persist in talking in a very matter-of-fact way. All the afternoon, while he was weaving a luminous web of imagination around her, she was continually cutting it asunder, and stepping forth as an authority on the growing of some wretched plants, or the means by which rain was to be excluded from window-sills. And now, in this strange twilight, when she ought to have been singing of the cruelties of the sea, or listening to half-forgotten legends of mermaids —she was engaged with the petty fortunes of men and girls who were pleased to find themselves prospering in the Glasgow police-force, or educating themselves in a milliner's shop in Edinburgh. She did not appear conscious that she was a Princess. Indeed, she seemed to have no consciousness of herself at all; and was altogether occupied in giving him information about practical subjects in which he professed a profound interest he certainly did not feel.

But even Sheila, when they had reached the loftiest part of their route, and could see beneath them the island and the water surrounding it, was struck by the exceeding beauty of the twilight; and as for her companion, he remembered it many a time thereafter, as if it were a dream of the sea. Before them lay the Atlantic—a pale line of blue, still, silent, and remote. Overhead, the sky was of a clear, thin gold, with heavy masses of violet cloud stretched across from north to south, and thickening as they got near to the horizon. Down at their feet, near the shore, a dusky line of huts and houses was scarcely visible; and over these lay a pale blue film of peat-smoke that did not move in the still air. Then they saw the bay into which the White Water runs, and they could trace the yellow glimmer of the river stretching into the island through a level valley of bog and morass. Far away towards the east, lay the bulk of the island—dark green undulations of moorland and pasture; and there, in the darkness, the gable of one white house had caught the clear light of the sky, and was gleaming westward like a star. But all this was as nothing to the glory that began to shine in the south-east, where the sky was of a pale violet over the peaks of Mealasabhal and Suainabhal. There, into the beautiful dome, rose the golden crescent of the moon, warm in colour, as though it still retained the last rays of the sunset. A line of quivering gold fell across Loch Roag, and touched the black hull and spars of the boat in which Sheila had been sailing in the morning. That bay down there, with its white sands and massive rocks, its still expanse of water, and its background of mountain-peaks palely coloured by the yellow moonlight, seemed

really a home for a magic princess who was shut off from all the world. But here, in front of them, was another sort of sea, and another sort of life—a small fishing-village hidden under a cloud of pale peat smoke, and fronting the great waters of the Atlantic itself, which lay under a gloom of violet clouds.

"Now," said Sheila, with a smile, "we have not always weather as good as this in the island. Will you not sit on the bench over there with Mr. Ingram, and wait until my papa and I come up from the village again?"

"May not I go down with you?"

"No. The dogs would learn you were a stranger, and there would be a great deal of noise, and there will be many of the poor people asleep."

So Sheila had her way; and she and her father went down the hillside into the gloom of the village, while Lavender went to join his friend Ingram, who was sitting on the wooden bench, silently smoking a clay pipe.

"Well, I have never seen the like of this," said Lavender, in his impetuous way; "it is worth going a thousand miles to see! Such colours and such clearness—and then the splendid outlines of those mountains, and the grand sweep of the loch—this is the sort of thing that drives me to despair, and might make one vow never to touch a brush again. And Sheila says it will be like this all the night through."

He was unaware that he had spoken of her in a very familiar way; but Ingram noticed it.

"Ingram," he said, suddenly, "that is the first girl I have ever seen whom I should like to marry."

"Stuff!"

"But it is true. I have never seen anyone like her —so handsome, so gentle, and yet so very frank in setting you right. And then she is so sensible, you know, and not too proud to have much interest in all sorts of common affairs——"

There was a smile on Ingram's face; and his companion stopped, in some vexation.

"You are not a very sympathetic confidant."

"Because I know the story of old. You have told it me about twenty women; and it is always the same. I tell you, you don't know anything at all about Sheila Mackenzie yet; perhaps you never may. I suppose you will make a heroine of her, and fall in love with her for a fortnight, and then go back to London and get cured by listening to the witticisms of Mrs. Lorraine."

"Well," said the young man, humbly, "perhaps I have given you reason to mistrust me; but you will see by and by whether I am serious or not this time."

"Some day," Ingram continued, "no doubt, you will love a woman for what she is, not for what you fancy her to be; but that is a piece of good fortune that seldom occurs to a youth of your age. To marry in a dream, and wake up six months afterwards—that is the fate of ingenuous twenty-three. But don't you let Mackenzie hear you talk of marrying Sheila, or he'll have some of his fishermen throw you into Loch Roag."

"There, now, that *is* one point I can't understand about her," said Lavender. "How can a girl of her shrewdness and good sense have such a belief in that

humbugging old idiot of a father of hers, who fancies me a political emissary, and plays small tricks to look like diplomacy? It is always 'My papa can do this,' and 'My papa can do that,' and 'There is no one at all like my papa.' And she is continually fondling him, and giving little demonstrations of affection, of which he takes no more notice than if he were an Arctic bear."

Ingram looked up with some surprise in his face.

"You don't mean to say, Lavender," he said, slowly, "that you are already jealous of the girl's own father?"

He could not answer, for at this moment Sheila, her father, and the big greyhound came up the hill. And again it was Lavender's good fortune to walk with Sheila across the moorland path they had traversed some little time before. And now the moon was still higher in the heavens, and the yellow lane of light that crossed the violet waters of Loch Roag quivered in a deeper gold. The night air was scented with the Dutch clover growing down by the shore. They could hear the curlew whistling, and the plover calling, amid that monotonous plash of the waves that murmured all around the coast. When they returned to the house, the darker waters of the Atlantic, and the purple clouds of the west, were shut out from sight; and before them there was only the liquid plain of Loch Roag, with its pathway of yellow fire, and far away on the other side the shoulders and peaks of the southern mountains, that had grown grey, and clear, and sharp in the beautiful twilight. And this was Sheila's home.

CHAPTER IV.

Romance-time

EARLY morning at Borva, fresh, luminous, and rare; the mountains in the south grown pale and cloud-like under a sapphire sky; the sea ruffled into a darker blue by a light breeze from the west; and the sunlight lying hot on the red gravel and white shells around Mackenzie's house. There is an odour of sweet-brier about, hovering in the warm, still air, except at such times as the breeze freshens a bit, and brings round the shoulder of the hill the cold, strange scent of the rocks and the sea beyond.

And on this fresh and pleasant morning, Sheila sat in the big garden-seat in front of the house, talking to the stranger to whom she had been introduced the day before. He was no more a stranger, however, to all appearances; for what could be more frank and friendly than their conversation, or more bright and winning than the smile with which she frequently turned to speak or to listen? Of course, this stranger could not be her friend as Mr. Ingram was—that was impossible. But he talked a great deal more than Mr. Ingram, and was apparently more anxious to please and be pleased; and, indeed, was altogether very winning, and courteous, and pleasant in his ways. Beyond this vague impression, Sheila ventured upon no comparison between the two men. If her older friend had been down, she would doubtless have preferred talking to him—about all that had happened in the island since his last visit; but here was this newer friend thrown, as it were, upon her hospitality, and

eager, with a most respectful and yet simple and friendly interest, to be taught all that Ingram already knew. Was he not, too, in mere appearance like one of the princes she had read of in many an ancient ballad—tall, and handsome, and yellow-haired—fit to have come sailing over the sea, with a dozen merry comrades, to carry off some sea-king's daughter to be his bride? Sheila began to regret that the young man knew so little about the sea, and the northern islands, and those old stories; but then he was very anxious to learn.

"You must say *Mach-Klyoda* instead of Macleod," she was saying to him, "if you like *Styornoway* better than Stornoway. It is the Gaelic, that is all."

"Oh, it is ever so much prettier," said young Lavender, with a quite genuine enthusiasm in his face, not altogether begotten of the letter *y;* "and indeed I don't think you can possibly tell how singularly pleasant and quaint it is to an English ear to hear just that little softening of the vowels that the people have here. I suppose you don't notice that they say *gyarden* for garden——"

They!—as if he had paid attention to the pronunciation of anyone except Sheila herself!

"——but not quite so hard as I pronounce it. And so with a great many other words—that are softened, and sweetened, and made almost poetical in their sound by the least bit of inflection. How surprised and pleased English ladies would be to hear you speak. Oh, I beg your pardon—I did not mean to——I—I beg your pardon——"

Sheila seemed a little astonished by her companion's evident mortification, and said, with a smile—

"If others speak so in the island, of course I must too! and you say it does not shock you."

His distress at his own rudeness now found an easy vent. He protested that no people could talk English like the people of Lewis. He gave Sheila to understand that the speech of English folks was as the croaking of ravens compared with the sweet tones of the northern isles; and this drew him on to speak of his friends in the South, and of London, and of the chances of Sheila ever going thither.

"It must be so strange never to have seen London," he said. "Don't you ever dream of what it is like? Don't you ever try to think of a great space, nearly as big as this island, all covered over with large houses—the roads between the houses all made of stone—and great bridges going over the rivers, with railway-trains standing——By the way, you have never seen a railway-engine!"

He looked at her for a moment in astonishment, as if he had not hitherto realized to himself the absolute ignorance of this remote Princess. Sheila, with some little touch of humour appearing in her calm eyes, said—

"But I am not quite ignorant of all these things. I have seen pictures of them, and my papa has described them to me so often that I will feel as if I had seen them all, and I do not think I should be surprised—except, perhaps, by the noise of the big towns. It was many a time my papa told me of that; but he says I cannot understand it, nor the great distance of land you travel over to get to London. That is what I do not wish to see—I was often thinking of

it, and that to pass so many places that you do not know would make you very sad."

"That can be easily avoided," he said, lightly. "When you go to London, you must go from Glasgow or Edinburgh in a night train, and fall fast asleep, and in the morning you will find yourself in London, without having seen anything."

"Just as if one had gone across a great distance of sea, and come to another island you will never see before," said Sheila, with the grey-blue eyes, under the black eyelashes, grown strange and distant.

"But you must not think of it as a melancholy thing," he said, almost anxiously. "You will find yourself among all sorts of gaieties and amusements; you will have cheerful people around you, and plenty of things to see; you will drive in beautiful parks, and go to theatres, and meet people in large and brilliant rooms, filled with flowers, and silver, and light. And all through the winter, that must be so cold and dark up here, you will find abundance of warmth and light, and plenty of flowers, and every sort of pleasant thing. You will hear no more of those songs about drowned people; and you will no longer be afraid of the storms, or listen to the waves at night; and by and by, when you have got quite accustomed to London, and got a great many friends, you might be disposed to stay there altogether; and you would grow to think of this island as a desolate and melancholy place, and never seek to come back."

The girl rose suddenly, and turned to a fuchsia-tree, pretending to pick some of its flowers. Tears had sprung to her eyes unbidden; and it was in rather

an uncertain voice that she said, still managing to conceal her face—

"I like to hear you talk of those places; but—but I will never leave Borva."

What possible interest could he have in combating this decision so anxiously, almost so imploringly? He renewed his complaints against the melancholy of the sea, and the dreariness of the northern winters. He described again and again the brilliant lights and colours of town-life in the South. As a mere matter of experience and education she ought to go to London; and had not her papa as good as intimated his intention of taking her?

In the midst of these representations, a step was heard in the hall, and then the girl looked round with a bright light on her face.

"Well, Sheila?" said Ingram, according to his custom; and both the girl's hands were in his the next minute. "You are down early. What have you been about? Have you been telling Mr. Lavender of the Black Horse of Loch Suainabhal?"

"No; Mr. Lavender has been telling me of London."

"And I have been trying to induce Miss Mackenzie to pay us a visit, so that we may show her the difference between a city and an island. But all to no purpose. Miss Mackenzie seems to like hard winters, and darkness, and cold: and as for that perpetual and melancholy sea, that in the winter-time I should fancy might drive anybody into a lunatic asylum——"

"Ah, you must not talk badly of the sea," said the girl, with all her courage and brightness returned to her face. "It is our very good friend. It gives us

food, and keeps many people alive. It carries the lads away to other places, and brings them back with money in their pockets——"

"And sometimes it smashes a few of them on the rocks, or swallows up a dozen families, and the next morning it is as smooth and fair as if nothing had happened."

"But that is not the sea at all," said Sheila; "that is the storms that will wreck the boats; and how can the sea help that? When the sea is let alone the sea is very good to us."

Ingram laughed aloud, and patted the girl's head fondly; and Lavender, blushing a little, confessed he was beaten, and that he would never again, in Miss Mackenzie's presence, say anything against the sea.

The King of Borva now appearing, they all went in to breakfast; and Sheila sat opposite the window, so that all the light coming in from the clear sky and the sea was reflected upon her face, and lit up every varying expression that crossed it, or that shone up in the beautiful deeps of her eyes. Lavender, his own face in shadow, could look at her from time to time himself unseen; and as he sate in almost absolute silence, and noticed how she talked with Ingram, and what deference she paid him, and how anxious she was to please him, he began to wonder if he should ever be admitted to a like friendship with her. It was so strange too, that this handsome, proud-featured, proud-spirited girl should so devote herself to the amusement of a man like Ingram; and forgetting all the court that should have been paid to a pretty woman, seem determined to persuade him that he was conferring a favour upon her by every word

and look. Of course, Lavender admitted to himself, Ingram was a very good sort of fellow—a very good sort of fellow indeed. If anyone was in a scrape about money, Ingram would come to the rescue without a moment's hesitation; although the salary of a clerk in the Board of Trade might have been made the excuse, by any other man, for a very justifiable refusal. He was very clever, too—had read much, and all that kind of thing. But he was not the sort of man you might expect to get on well with women. Unless with very intimate friends, he was a trifle silent and reserved. Often he was inclined to be pragmatic and sententious; and had a habit of saying unpleasantly bitter things, when some careless joke was being made. He was a little dingy in appearance; and a man who had a somewhat cold manner, who was sallow of face, who was obviously getting grey, and who was generally insignificant in appearance, was not the sort of man, one would think, to fascinate an exceptionally handsome girl, who had brains enough to know the fineness of her own face. But here was this Princess paying attentions to him such as must have driven a more impressionable man out of his senses; while Ingram sat quiet and pleased, sometimes making fun of her, and generally talking to her as if she were a child. Sheila had chatted very pleasantly with him, Lavender, in the morning; but it was evident that her relations with Ingram were of a very different kind, such as he could not well understand. For it was scarcely possible that she could be in love with Ingram; and yet surely the pleasure that dwelt in her expressive face when she spoke to him, or listened to him, was not the result of a mere friendship.

If Lavender had been told at that moment that these two were lovers, and that they were looking forward to an early marriage, he would have rejoiced with an enthusiasm of joy. He would have honestly and cordially shaken Ingram by the hand; he would have made plans for introducing the young bride to all the people he knew; and he would have gone straight off, on reaching London, to buy Sheila a magnificent bracelet, even if he had to borrow the money from Ingram himself.

"And have you got rid yet of the *Airgiod-cearc*,* Sheila?" said Ingram, suddenly breaking in upon these dreams; "or does every owner of hens still pay his annual shilling to the Lord of Lewis?"

"It is not away yet," said the girl, "but when Sir James comes in the autumn, I will go over to Stornoway, and ask him to take away the tax, and I know he will do it, for what is the shilling worth to him, when he has spent thousands and thousands of pounds on the Lewis? But it will be very hard on some of the poor people that only keep one or two hens; and I will tell Sir James of all that——"

"You will do nothing of the kind, Sheila," said her father, impatiently. "What is the *Airgiod-cearc* to you, that you will go over to Stornoway only to be laughed at, and make a fool of yourself?"

"That is nothing, not anything at all," said the girl, "if Sir James will only take away the tax."

"Why, Sheila, they would treat you as another Lady Godiva," said Ingram, with a good-humoured smile.

"But Miss Mackenzie is quite right," exclaimed

* Pronounced *Argyud-chark*; literally, Hen-money.

Lavender, with a sudden flush of colour leaping into his handsome face, and an honest glow of admiration into his eyes; "I think it is a very noble thing for her to do, and nobody, either in Stornoway or anywhere else, would be such a brute as to laugh at her for trying to help those poor people, who have not too many friends and defenders, God knows!"

Ingram looked surprised. Since when had the young gentleman across the table acquired such a singular interest in the poorer classes, of whose very existence he had for the most part seemed unaware? But the enthusiasm in his face was quite honest; there could be no doubt of that. As for Sheila, with a beating heart, she ventured to send to her champion a brief and timid glance of gratitude, which the young man observed, and never forgot.

"You will not know what it is all about," said the King of Borva, with a peevish air, as though it were too bad that a person of his authority should have to descend to petty details about a hen-tax. "It is many and many a tax and a due Sir James will take away from his tenants in the Lewis, and he will spend more money a thousand times than ever he will get back; and it was this *Airgiod-cearc*, it will stand in the place of a great many other things taken away, just to remind the folk that they have not their land all in their own right. It is many things you will have to do in managing the poor people, not to let them get too proud, or forgetful of what they owe to you; and now there is no more tacksmen to be the masters of the small crofters, and the crofters they would think they were landlords themselves if there were no dues for them to pay."

"I have heard of those middle-men; they were dreadful tyrants and thieves, weren't they?" said Lavender.

Ingram kicked his foot under the table.

"I mean that was the popular impression of them —a vulgar error, I presume," continued the young man, in the coolest manner. "And so you have got rid of them! Well, I daresay many of them were honest men, and suffered very unjustly in common report."

Mackenzie answered nothing, but his daughter said quickly—

"But you know, Mr. Lavender, they have not gone away merely because they cease to have the letting of the land to the crofters. They have still their old holdings, and so have the crofters in most cases. Everyone now holds direct from the proprietor, that is all."

"So that there is no difference between the former tacksmen and his serf, except the relative size of their farms?"

"Well, the crofters have no leases, but the tacksmen have," said the girl, somewhat timidly; and then she added, "But you have not decided yet, Mr. Ingram, what you will do to-day. It is too clear for the salmon-fishing. Will you go over to Mevaig, and show Mr. Lavender the Bay of Uig, and the Seven Hunters?"

"Surely we must show him Borvabost first, Sheila," said Ingram. "He saw nothing of it last night, in the dark; and I think, if you offered to take Mr. Lavender round in your boat, and show him what a clever

sailor you are, he would prefer that to walking over the hill."

"I can take you all round in the boat, certainly," said the girl, with a quick blush of pleasure; and forthwith a message was sent to Duncan, that cushions should be taken down to the *Maighdean-mhara*, the little vessel of which Sheila was both skipper and pilot.

How beautiful was the fair sea-picture that lay around them, as the *Maighdean-mhara* stood out to the mouth of Loch Roag on this bright summer morning! Sheila sat in the stern of the small boat, her hand on the tiller. Bras lay at her feet, his nose between his long and shaggy paws. Duncan, grave and watchful as to the winds and the points of the coast, sat amidships, with the mainsail-sheet held fast, and superintended the seamanship of his young mistress, with a respectful but most evident pride. And as Ingram had gone off with Mackenzie to walk over to the White Water before going down to Borvabost, Frank Lavender was Sheila's sole companion, out in this wonder-land of rock, and sea, and blue sky.

He did not talk much to her; and she was so well occupied with the boat that he could regard with impunity the shifting lights and graces of her face and all the wonder and winning depths of her eyes. The sea was blue around them. The sky overhead had not a speck of cloud in it. The white sand-bays, the green stretches of pasture, and the far and spectral mountains trembled in a haze of sunlight. Then there was all the delight of the fresh and cool wind, the hissing of the water along the boat, and joyous rapidity with which the small vessel, lying over a

little, ran through the crisply curling waves, and brought into view the newer wonders of the opening sea.

Was it not all a dream—that he should be sitting by the side of this Sea-Princess, who was attended only by her deerhound and the tall keeper? And if a dream, why should it not go on for ever? To live for ever in this magic land—to have the Princess herself to carry him in this little boat into the quiet bays of the islands, or out at night, in moonlight, on the open sea—to forget for ever the godless South and its social phantasmagoria, and live in this beautiful and distant solitude, with the solemn secrets of the hills and the moving deep for ever present to the imagination,—might not that be something of a nobler life? And some day or other he would take this Island-Princess up to London, and he would bid the women that he knew—the scheming mothers and the doll-like daughters—stand aside from before this perfect work of God. She would carry with her the mystery of the sea in the depths of her eyes, and the music of the far hills would be heard in her voice, and all the sweetness, and purity, and brightness of the clear summer skies would be mirrored in her innocent soul. She would appear in London as some wild-plumaged bird, hailing from distant climes, and before she had lived there long enough to grow sad, and have the weight of the city clouding the brightness of her eyes, she would be spirited away again into this strange sea-kingdom, where there seemed to be perpetual sunshine, and the light music of waves.

Poor Sheila! she little knew what was expected of her, or the sort of drama into which she was being

thrown as a central figure. She little knew that she was being transformed into a wonderful creature of romance, who was to put to shame the gentle dames and maidens of London society and do many other extraordinary things. But what would have appeared the most extraordinary of all these speculations, if she had only known of them, was the assumption that she would marry Frank Lavender. That the young man had quite naturally taken for granted—but, perhaps only as a basis of his imaginative scenes. In order to do these things she would have to be married to somebody; and why not to himself? Think of the pride he would have in leading this beautiful girl, with her quaint manners and fashion of speech, into a London drawing-room. Would not everyone wish to know her? Would not everyone listen to her singing of those Gaelic songs?—for, of course, she must sing well. Would not all his artist friends be anxious to paint her? and she would go to the Academy to convince the loungers there how utterly the canvas had failed to catch the light and dignity and sweetness of her face.

When Sheila spoke he started.

"Did you not see it?"

"What?"

"The seal; it rose for a moment just over there," said the girl, with a great interest visible in her eyes.

The beautiful dreams he had been dreaming were considerably shattered by this interruption. How could a fairy Princess be so interested in some common animal showing its head out of the sea? It also occurred to him just at this moment, that if Sheila and Mairi went out in this boat by themselves, they

must be in the habit of hoisting up the mainsail, and was such rude and coarse work befitting the character of a Princess?

"He looks very like a black man in the water when his head comes up," said Sheila, "when the water is smooth so that you will see him look at you. But I have not told you yet about the Black Horse that Alister-nan-Each saw at Loch Suainabhal one night. Loch Suainabhal, that is inland, and fresh water, so it was not a seal; but Alister was going along the shore, and he saw it lying up by the road, and he looked at it for a long time. It was quite black, and he thought it was a boat; but when he came near he saw it begin to move, and then it went down across the shore and splashed into the loch. And it had a head bigger than a horse, and quite black, and it made a noise as it went down the shore to the loch."

"Don't you think Alister must have been taking a little whisky, Miss Mackenzie?"

"No, not that, for he came to me just after he will see the beast."

"And do you really believe he saw such an animal?" said Lavender, with a smile.

"I do not know," said the girl, gravely. "Perhaps it was only a fright and he imagined he saw it; but I do not know it is impossible there can be such an animal at Loch Suainabhal. But that is nothing. It is of no consequence. But I have seen stranger things than the Black Horse, that many people will not believe."

"May I ask what they are?" he said, gently.

"Some other time, perhaps, I will tell you; but

there is a great deal of explanation about it—and you see, we are going in to Borvabost."

Was this, then, the capital of the small empire over which the Princess ruled? He saw before him but a long row of small huts or hovels resembling beehives, which stood above the curve of a white bay, and at one portion of the bay was a small creek, near which a number of large boats, bottom upwards, lay on the beach. What odd little dwellings those were! The walls, a few feet high, were built of rude blocks of stone or slices of turf; and from those low supports rose a rounded roof of straw, which was thatched over by a further layer of turf. There were few windows, and no chimneys at all—not even a hole in the roof. And what was meant by the two men who, standing on one of the turf walls, were busily engaged in digging into the rich brown and black thatch and heaving it into a cart? Sheila had to explain to him that, while she was doing everything in her power to get the people to suffer the introduction of windows, it was hopeless to think of chimneys; for by carefully guarding against the egress of the peat-smoke, it slowly saturated the thatch of the roof, which, at certain periods of the year, was then taken off to dress the fields, and a new roof of straw put on. By this time they had run the *Maighdean-mhara*—the Sea Maiden—into a creek, and were climbing up the steep beach of shingle that had been worn smooth by the waters of the Atlantic.

"And will you want to speak to me, Ailasa?" said Sheila, turning to a small girl who had approached her somewhat diffidently.

She was a pretty little thing, with a round fair

face, tanned by the sun, brown hair, and soft dark eyes. She was bare-headed, bare-footed, and bare-armed; but she was otherwise smartly dressed, and she held in her hand an enormous flounder apparently about half as heavy as herself.

"Will ye hef the fesh, Miss Sheila?" said the small Ailasa, holding out the flounder, but looking down all the same.

"Did you catch it yourself, Ailasa?"

"Yes, it wass Donald and me; we wass out in a boat, and Donald had a line."

"And it is a present for me?" said Sheila, patting the small head and its wild and soft hair. "Thank you, Aliasa. But you must ask Donald to carry it up to the house and give it to Mairi. I cannot take it with me just now, you know."

There was a small boy cowering behind one of the upturned boats; and, by his furtive peepings, showing that he was in league with his sister. Ailasa, not thinking that she was discovering his whereabouts, turned quite naturally in that direction, until she was suddenly stopped by Lavender, who called to her, and put his hand in his pocket. But he was too late. Sheila had stepped in, and, with a quick look, which was all the protest that was needed, shut her hand over the half-crown he had in his fingers.

"Never mind, Ailasa," she said. "Go away and get Donald, and bid him carry the fish up to Mairi."

Lavender put the half-crown in his pocket in a somewhat dazed fashion: what he chiefly knew was that Sheila had for a moment held his hand in hers, and that her eyes had met his.

Well, that little incident of Ailasa and the flounder

was rather pleasant to him. It did not shock the romantic associations he had begun to weave around his fair companion. But when they had gone up to the cottages—Mackenzie and Ingram not yet having arrived—and when Sheila proceeded to tell him about the circumstances of the fishermen's lives, and to explain how such and such things were done in the fields, and in the pickling-houses, and so forth, Lavender was a little disappointed. Sheila took him into some of the cottages, or rather hovels, and he vaguely knew in the darkness that she sat down by the low glow of the peat-fire, and began to ask the women about all sorts of improvements in the walls and windows, and gardens, and what not. Surely it was not for a Princess to go advising people about particular sorts of soap; or offering to pay for a pane of glass if the husband of the woman would make the necessary aperture in the stone wall. The picture of Sheila appearing as a Sea-Princess in a London drawing-room was all very beautiful in its way; but here she was discussing as to the quality given to broth by the addition of a certain vegetable which she offered to send down from her own garden if the cottager in question would try to grow it.

"I wonder, Miss Mackenzie," he said, at length, when they got outside—his eyes dazed with the light, and smarting with the peat-smoke—"I wonder you can trouble yourself with such little matters that those people should find out for themselves."

The girl looked up with some surprise.

"That is the work I have to do. My papa cannot do everything in the island."

"But what is the necessity for your bothering your-

self about such things? Surely they ought to be able to look after their own gardens and houses. It is no degradation—certainly not; for anything you interested yourself in would become worthy of attention by the very fact; but, after all, it seems such a pity you should give up your time to those commonplace details——"

"But some one must do it," said the girl, quite innocently; "and my papa has no time. And they will be very good in doing what I ask them—everyone in the island."

Was this a wilful affectation? he said to himself. Or was she really incapable of understanding that there was anything incongruous in a young lady of her position, education, and refinement, busying herself with the curing of fish and the cost of lime? He had himself marked the incongruity long ago, when Ingram had been telling him of the remote and beautiful maiden whose only notions of the world had been derived from literature—who was more familiar with the magic land in which Endymion wandered than with any other—and that, at the same time, she was about as good as her father at planning a wooden bridge over a stream. When Lavender had got outside again—when he found himself walking with her along the white beach, in front of the blue Atlantic—she was again the Princess of his dreams. He looked at her face, and he saw in her eyes that she must be familiar with all the romantic nooks and glades of English poetry. The plashing of the waves down there, and the music of her voice, recalled the sad legends of the fishermen he hoped to hear her sing. But ever and anon there occurred a jarring recollection,

whether arising from a contradiction between his notion of Sheila and the actual Sheila, or whether from some incongruity in himself, he did not stop to consider. He only knew that a beautiful maiden who had lived by the sea all her life, and who had followed the wanderings of Endymion in the enchanted forest, need not have been so particular about a method of boiling potatoes, or have shown so much interest in a pattern for children's frocks.

Mackenzie and Ingram met them. There was the usual "Well, Sheila?" followed by a thousand questions about the very things she had been inquiring into. That was one of the odd points about Ingram that puzzled and sometimes vexed Lavender; for, if you are walking home at night, it is inconvenient to be accompanied by a friend who would stop to ask about the circumstances of some old crone hobbling along the pavement, or who could linger on his own doorstep to have a chat with a garrulous policeman. Ingram was about as odd as Sheila herself in the attention he paid to those wretched cotters and their doings. He could not advise on the important subject of broth, but he would have tasted it by way of discovery, even if it had been presented to him in a teacup. He had already been prowling round the place with Mackenzie. He had inspected the apparatus in the creek for hauling up the boats. He had visited the curing-houses. He had examined the heaps of fish drying on the beach. He had drunk whiskey with John the Piper, and shaken hands with Alister-nan-Each. And now he had come to tell Sheila that the piper was bringing down luncheon from Mackenzie's house, and that after they had eaten and drank on the

white beach, they would put out the *Maighdean-mhara* once more to sea, and sail over to Mevaig, that the stranger might see the wondrous sands of the Bay of Uig.

But it was not in consonance with the dignity of a King that his guests should eat from off the pebbles, like so many fishermen, and when Mairi and another girl brought down the baskets, luncheon was placed in the stern of the small vessel, while Duncan got up the sails and put out from the stone quay. As for John the Piper, was he insulted at having been sent on a menial errand? They had scarcely got away from the shore when the sound of the pipes was wafted to them from the hill-side above, and it was the "Lament of Mackrimmon" that followed them out to sea—

> "Mackrimmon shall no more return,
> Oh never, never more return!"

—that was the wild and ominous air that was skirling up on the hill-side; and Mackenzie's face, as he heard it, grew wroth.

"That teffle of a piper John!" he said, with an involuntary stamp of his foot; "what for will he be playing *Cha till mi tuilich?*"

"It is out of mischief, papa," said Sheila; "that is all."

"It will be more than mischief if I burn his pipes, and drive him out of Borva. Then there will be no more of mischief."

"It is very bad of John to do that," said Sheila to Lavender, apparently in explanation of her father's anger; "for we have given him shelter here, when there will be no more pipes in all the Lewis. It was the Free Church ministers they put down the pipes, for

there was too much wildness at the marriages when the pipes would play."

"And what do the people dance to now?" asked the young gentleman, who seemed to resent this piece of paternal government.

Sheila laughed, in an embarrassed way.

"Miss Mackenzie would rather not tell you," said Ingram. "The fact is, the noble mountaineers of these districts have had to fall back on the Jew's-harp. The ministers allow that instrument to be used—I suppose because there is a look of piety in the name. But the dancing doesn't get very mad when you have two or three young fellows playing a strathspey on a bit of trembling wire."

"That teffle of a piper John!" growled Mackenzie, once more; and so the *Maighdean-mhara* lightly sped on her way, opening out the various headlands of the islands, until at last she got into the narrows by Eilean-Aird-Meinish, and ran up the long arm of the sea to Mevaig.

They landed, and went up the rocks. They passed one or two small white houses, overlooking the still, green waters of the sea; and then, following the line of a river, plunged into the heart of a strange and lonely district, in which there appeared to be no life. The river-track took them up a great glen, the sides of which were about as sheer as a railway-cutting. There were no trees or bushes about, but the green pasture along the bed of the valley wore its brightest colours in the warm sunlight, and far up on the hill-sides, the browns and crimsons of the heather and the silver-grey of the rocks trembled in the white haze of

the heat. Over that again the blue sky, as still and silent as the world below.

They wandered on, content with idleness and a fine day. Mr. Mackenzie was talking, with some little loudness, so that Lavender might hear, of Mr. John Stuart Mill, and was anxious to convey to Ted Ingram that a wise man, who is responsible for the well-being of his fellow-creatures, will study all sides of all questions, however dangerous. Sheila was doing her best to entertain the stranger; and he, in a dream of his own, was listening to the information she gave him. How much of it did he carry away? He was told that the grey-goose built its nest in the rushes at the edge of lakes. Sheila knew several nests in Borva. Sheila also caught the young of the wild duck when the mother was guiding them down the hill-rivulets to the sea. She had tamed many of them, catching them thus before they could fly. The names of most of the mountains about here ended in *bhal*, which was a Gaelic corruption of the Norse *fiall*, a mountain. There were many Norse names all through the Lewis, but more particularly towards the Butt. The termination *bost*, for example, at the end of many words, meant an inhabited place; but she fancied *bost* was Danish. And did Mr. Lavender know of the legend connected with the air of *Cha till, cha till mi tuilich?*

Lavender started as from a trance, with an impression that he had been desperately rude. He was about to say that the grey gosling in the legend could not speak Scandinavian, when he was interrupted by Mr. Mackenzie turning and asking him if he knew from what ports the English smacks hailed that came up hither to the cod and the ling fishing for a couple

of months in the autumn. The young man said he did not know: there were many fishermen at Brighton. And when the King of Borva turned to Ingram, to see why he was shouting with laughter, Miss Sheila suddenly announced to the party that before them lay the great Bay of Uig.

It was certainly a strange and impressive scene. They stood on the top of a lofty range of hill, and underneath them lay a vast semi-circle, miles in extent, of gleaming white sand, that had in bygone ages been washed in by the Atlantic. Into this vast plain of silver whiteness, the sea, entering by a somewhat narrow portal, stretched in long arms of a pale blue. Elsewhere, the great crescent of sand was surrounded by a low line of rocky hill, showing a thousand tints of olive-green, and grey, and heather-purple; and beyond that again rose the giant bulk of Mealasabhal —grown pale in the heat—into the southern sky. There was not a ship visible along the blue plain of the Atlantic. The only human habitation to be seen in the strange world beneath them was a solitary manse. But away towards the summit of Mealasabhal two specks slowly circled in the air, which Sheila thought were eagles; and far out on the western sea, lying like dusky whales in the vague blue, were the Flannen islands — the remote and unvisited Seven Hunters, whose only inhabitants are certain flocks of sheep belonging to dwellers on the mainland of Lewis.

The travellers sat down on a low block of gneiss, to rest themselves; and then and there did the King of Borva recite his grievances and rage against the English smacks. Was it not enough that they should

in passing steal the sheep, but that they should also, in mere wantonness, stalk them as deer, wounding them with rifle-bullets, and leaving them to die among the rocks! Sheila said bravely that no one could tell that it was the English fishermen who did that. Why not the crews of merchant-vessels, who might be of any nation? It was unfair to charge upon any body of men such a despicable act, when there was no proof of it whatever.

"Why, Sheila," said Ingram, with some surprise, "you never doubted before that it was the English smacks that killed the sheep."

Sheila cast down her eyes, and said nothing.

Was the sinister prophecy of John the Piper to be fulfilled? Mackenzie was so much engaged in expounding politics to Ingram, and Sheila was so proud to show her companion all the wonders of Uig, that, when they returned to Mevaig in the evening, the wind had altogether gone down, and the sea was as a sea of glass. But if John the Piper had been ready to foretell for Mackenzie the fate of Mackrimmon, he had taken means to defeat destiny by bringing over from Borvabost a large and heavy boat pulled by six rowers. These were not strapping young fellows, clad in the best blue cloth to be got in Stornoway, but elderly men, grey, wrinkled, weather-beaten, and hard of face, who sat stolidly in the boat and listened with a sort of bovine gaze to the old hunchback's wicked stories and jokes. John was in a mischievous mood; but Lavender, in a confidential whisper, informed Sheila that her father would speedily be avenged on the inconsiderate piper.

"Come, men, sing us a song, quick!" said Mackenzie,

as the party took their seats in the stern, and the great oars splashed into the sea of gold. "Look sharp, John—and no teffle of a drowning song!"

In a shrill, high, querulous voice, the piper, who was himself pulling one of the two stroke oars, began to sing; and then the men behind him, gathering courage, joined in an octave lower, their voices being even more uncertain and lugubrious than his own. These poor fishermen had not had the musical education of Clan-Alpine's warriors. The performance was not enlivening; and as the monotonous and melancholy sing-song that kept time to the oars told its story in Gaelic, all that the English strangers could make out was an occasional reference to Jura, or Scarba, or Isla. It was, indeed, the song of an exile shut up in "seaworn Mull," who was complaining of the wearisome look of the neighbouring islands.

"But why do you sing such Gaelic as that, John?" said young Lavender, confidently. "I should have thought a man in your position—the last of the Hebridean bards—would have known the classical Gaelic. Don't you know the classical Gaelic?"

"There iss only the wan sort of Kâllic, and it iss a ferry goot sort of Kâllic," said the piper, with some show of petulance.

"Do you mean to tell me you don't know your own tongue? Do you not know what the greatest of all the bards wrote about your own island?—O et præsidium et dulce decus meum, *agus*, Tityre tu patulæ recubans sub tegmine *Styornoway*, Arma virumque cano, *Macklyoda*, et *Borvabost* sub tegmine fagi?"

Not only John the Piper, but all the men behind him, began to look amazed and sorely troubled; and

all the more so that Ingram—who had picked up more Gaelic words than his friend—came to his assistance, and began to talk to him in this unknown tongue. They heard references in the conversation to persons and things with which they were familiar in their own language, but still accompanied by much more they could not understand. The men now began to whisper awe-stricken questions to each other; and at last John the Piper could not restrain his curiosity.

"What in ta name of Kott is tat sort of Kâllic?" he asked, with some look of fear in his eyes.

"You are not much of a student, John," said Lavender, carelessly, "but still a man in your position should know something of your own language. A bard, a poet, and not know the classical form of your own tongue!"

"Is it ta Welsh Kâllic?" cried John, in desperation; for he knew that the men behind him would carry the story of his ignorance all over Borvabost.

"The Welsh Gaelic! No. I see you will have to go to school again."

"There iss no more Kâllic in ta schools," said the Piper, eagerly seizing the excuse. "It iss Miss Sheila; she will hef put away all ta Kâllic from ta schools."

"But you were born half a century before Miss Sheila: how is it you neglected to learn that form of Gaelic that has been sacred to the use of the bards and poets since the time of Ossian?"

There were no more quips or cranks for John the Piper during the rest of the pull home. The wretched man relapsed into a moody silence, and worked mechanically at his oar, brooding over this mysterious language of which he had not even heard. As for

Lavender, he turned to Mackenzie, and begged to know what he thought of affairs in France.

And so they sailed back to Borvabost, over the smooth water that lay like a lake of gold. Was it not a strange sight to see the Atlantic one vast and smooth yellow plain, under the great glow of saffron that spread across the regions of the sunset? It was a world of light, unbroken but by the presence of a heavy coaster that had anchored in the bay, and that sent a long line of trembling black down on the perfect mirror of the sea. As they got near the shore, the portions that were in shadow showed with a strange distinctness the dark green of the pasture and the sharp outlines of the rocks; and there was a cold scent of sea-weed in the evening air. The six heavy oars splashed into the smooth bay. The big boat was moored to the quay; and its passengers landed once more in Borva. And when they turned, on their way home, to look from the brow of the hill on which Sheila had placed a garden-seat, lo! all the west was on fire, the mountains in the south had grown dark on their eastern side, and the plain of the sea was like a lake of blood, with the heavy hull and masts of the coaster grown large, and solemn, and distant. There was scarcely a ripple around the rocks at their feet to break the stillness of the approaching twilight.

So another day had passed, devoid of adventure or incident. Lavender had not rescued his wonderful Princess from an angry sea, nor had he shown prowess in slaying a dozen stags, nor in any way distinguished himself. To all outward appearance, the relations of the party were the same at night as they had been in the morning. But the greatest crises of life steal on

us imperceptibly, and have sometimes occurred and wound us in their consequences before we know. The memorable things in a man's career are not always marked by some sharp convulsion. The youth does not necessarily marry the girl whom he happens to fish out of a millpond: his future life may be far more definitely shaped for him at a prosaic dinner-table, where he fancies he is only thinking of the wines. We are indeed but as children seated on the shore, watching the ripples that come in to our feet; and while the ripples unceasingly repeat themselves, and while the hour that passes is but as the hour before it, constellation after constellation has gone by over our heads unheeded and unseen, and we awake with a start to find ourselves in a new day, with all our former life cut off from us and become as a dream.

CHAPTER V.

Sheila sings.

A KNOCKING at Ingram's door.

"Well, what's the matter?"

"Will ye be goin to ta fishin', Mr. Ingram?"

"Is that you, Duncan? How the devil have you got over from Mevaig at this hour of the morning?"

"Oh, there wass a bit breeze tis morning, and I hef prought over ta *Maighdean-mhara*. And there iss a very goot ripple on ta watter, if you will tek ta other gentleman to try for ta salmon."

"All right. Hammer at his door until he gets up. I shall be ready in ten minutes."

About half-an-hour thereafter the two young men were standing at the front of Mackenzie's house,

examining the enormous rod that Duncan had placed against the porch. It was still early morning, and there was a cold wind blowing in from the sea; but there was not a speck of cloud in the sky, and the day promised to be hot. The plain of the Atlantic was no longer a sheet of glass; it was rough and grey, and far out an occasional quiver of white showed where a wave was hissing over. There was not much of a sea on; but the heavy wash of the water round the rocks and sandy bays could be distinctly heard in the silence of the morning.

And what was this moving object down there by the shore, where the *Maighdean-mhara* lay at anchor? Both the young men at once recognized the glimmer of the small white feather, and the tightly-fitting rough blue dress of the Sea-Princess.

"Why, there is Sheila!" cried Ingram. "What in all the world is she about at such an hour?"

At this moment Duncan came out, with a book of flies in his hand, and he said, in rather a petulant way—

"And it iss no wonder Miss Sheila will be out. And it wass Miss Sheila herself will tell me to see if you will go to ta White Water and try for a salmon."

"And she is bringing up something from the boat: I must go and carry it for her," said Lavender, making down the path to the shore with the speed of a deer.

When Sheila and he came up the hill, there was a fine colour in the girl's face from her morning's exertions; but she was not disposed to go indoors to rest. On the contrary, she was soon engaged in helping Mairi to bring in some coffee to the parlour; while Duncan cut slices of ham and cold beef big

enough to have provisioned a fishing-boat bound for Caithness. Sheila had had her breakfast; so she devoted all her time to waiting upon her two guests, until Lavender could scarcely eat through the embarrassment produced by her noble servitude. Ingram was not so sensitive, and made a very good meal indeed.

"Where's your father, Sheila?" said Ingram, when the last of their preparations had been made, and they were about to start for the river. "Isn't he up yet?"

"My father?" said the girl, with the least possible elevation of her eyebrows; "he will be down at Borvabost an hour ago. And I hope that John the Piper will not see him this morning. But we must make haste, Mr. Ingram, for the wind will fall when the sun gets stronger, and then your friend will have no more of the fishing."

So they set out, and Ingram put Sheila's hand on his arm, and took her along with him in that fashion, while the tall gillie walked behind with Lavender, who was or was not pleased with the arrangement. The young man, indeed, was a trifle silent; but Duncan was in an amiable and communicative mood, and passed the time in telling him stories of the salmon he had caught and of the people who had tried to catch them and failed. Sheila and Ingram certainly went a good pace up the hill and round the summit of it, and down again into the valley of the White Water. The light step of the girl seemed to be as full of spring as the heather on which she trod; and as for her feet getting wet, the dew must have soaked them long ago. She was in the brightest of spirits. Lavender could hear her laughing in a low pleased

fashion; and then presently her head would be turned up towards her companion, and all the light of some humorous anecdote would appear in her face and in her eloquent eyes, and it would be Ingram's turn to break out into one of those short abrupt laughs that had something sardonic in them.

But hark!—from the other side of the valley comes another sound—the faint and distant skirl of the pipes; and yonder is the white-haired hunchback, a mere speck in a waste of brown and green morass. What is he playing to himself now?

"He is a foolish fellow, that John," said the tall keeper; "for if he comes down to Borvabost this morning, it iss Mr. Mackenzie will fling his pipes in ta sea, and he will hef to go away and work in ta steamboat. He iss a ferry foolish fellow; and it wass him tat wass goin' into ta steamboat before, and he went to a tailor in Styornoway, and he said to him, 'I want a pair o' troosers.' And the tailor said to him, 'What sort o' troosers iss it you will want?' And he said to him, 'I want a pair o' troosers for a steamboat.' A pair o' troosers for a steamboat! —who ever heard of a steamboat wantin' troosers? And it wass him that went in ta steamboat with a lot o' freens o' his, that wass a' goin' to Skye to a big weddin' there; and it wass a very bad passage, and when tey got into Portree, the captain said to him, 'John, where iss all your freens that tey do not come ashore?' And he said to him, 'I hef been down below, sir, and four-thirds o' ta whole o' them are a' half-trooned, and sick, and tead.' Four-thirds o' ta whole o' them!—and he iss just the ferry man to

laugh at every other pody when it iss a mistake you will make in ta English."

"I suppose," said Lavender, "you found it rather difficult to learn good English?"

"Well, sir, I hefna got ta goot English yet. But Miss Sheila she has put away all the Gaelic from the schools, and the young ones they will learn more of ta good English after that."

"I wish I knew as much Gaelic as you know English," said the young man.

"Oh, you will soon learn. It iss very easy, if you will only stay in ta island."

"It would take me several months to pick it up, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes—nine or six—that will do," said Duncan. "You will begin to learn ta name o' ta islands and ta places. There now, as far as you can see, is ta *Seann Bheinn*—and it means ta old hill. And there is a rock there—it is *Stac-nan-Balg*——"

Here Duncan looked rather perplexed.

"Yes," said Lavender, "what does that mean?"

"It means—it means," said Duncan, in still greater perplexity, and getting a little impatient, "it means—*stac*, tat iss a steep rock—Stack-nan-Balg—it means —well, sir, *it is ower deep for ta English.*"

The tone of mortification in which Duncan uttered these words warned Lavender that his philological studies might as well cease; and, indeed, Sheila and Ingram had by this time reached the banks of the White Water, and were waiting Duncan and the majestic rod.

It was much too bright and pleasant a morning

for good fishing, but there was a fair ripple on the pools of the stream, where ever and anon a salmon fresh run from the sea would leap into the air, showing a gleaming curve of silver to the sunlight. The splash of the big fish seemed an invitation; and Duncan was all anxiety to teach the stranger, who, as he fancied, knew nothing about throwing a fly. Ingram lay down on a rock some little distance back from the banks, and put his hands beneath his head, and watched the operations going forward. But was it really Duncan who was to teach the stranger? It was Sheila who picked out flies for him. It was Sheila who held the rod while he put them on the line. It was Sheila who told him where the bigger salmon usually lay—under the opposite bank of the broad and almost lake-like pool, into which the small but rapid White Water came tumbling and foaming down its narrow channel of rocks and stones.

Then Sheila waited to see her pupil begin. He had evidently a little difficulty about the big double-handed rod, a somewhat more formidable engine of destruction than the supple little thing with which he had whipped the streams of Devonshire and Cornwall. The first cast sent both flies and a lump of line tumbling on to the pool, and would have driven the boldest of salmon out of its wits. The second pretty nearly took a piece out of Ingram's ear, and made him shift his quarters with rapidity. Duncan gave him up in despair. But the third cast dropped both flies with the lightness of a feather in the running waters of the other side of the pool; and the next second there was a slight wave along the surface—a dexterous jerk with the butt—and presently the line

was whirled out into the middle of the pool, running rapidly off the reel from the straining rod.

"Plenty o' line, sir, plenty o' line!" shouted Duncan, in a wild fever of anxiety, for the fish had plunged suddenly.

Ingram had come running down to the bank. Sheila was all excitement and interest as she stood and watched every slackening or tightening of the line as the fish went up the pool, and down the pool, and crossed the current in his efforts to escape. The only self-possessed person, indeed, was Lavender himself, who presently said—

"Miss Mackenzie, won't you take the rod now and have the honour of landing him? I don't think he will show much more fight."

At this moment, however, the line slackened suddenly, and the fish threw himself clean out of the water, turning a complete somersault. It was a dangerous moment; but the captive was well hooked, and in his next plunge Lavender was admonished by Duncan to keep a good strain on him.

"I will take the second one," Sheila promised, "if you like; but you must surely land your first salmon yourself."

I suppose nobody but a fisherman can understand the generosity of the offer made by the young man. To have hooked your first salmon—to have its first wild rushes and plunges safely over—and to offer to another the delight of bringing him victoriously to bank! But Sheila knew. And what could have surpassed the cleverness with which he had hooked the fish, and the coolness and courage he showed through-

out the playing of him, except this more than royal offer on the part of the young man?

The fish was losing strength. All the line had been got in; although the forefinger of the fisherman felt the pulse of his captive, as it were, ready for any expiring plunge. They caught occasional glimpses of a large white body gliding through the ruddy brown water. Duncan was down on his knees more than once, with the landing-net in his hand, but again and again the big fish would sheer off, with just such indications of power as to make his conqueror cautious. At length he was guided slowly in to the bank. Behind him the landing-net was gently let into the water —then a quick forward movement—and a fourteen-pounder was scooped up and flung upon the bank, landing-net and all. "Hurrah!" cried Ingram; Lavender blushed like a school-girl; and Sheila, quite naturally and without thinking, shook hands with him, and said, "I congratulate you," and there was more congratulation in her glad eyes than in that simple little gesture.

It was a good beginning, and of course the young man was very much pleased to show Sheila that he was no mere lily-fingered idler about town. He buckled to his work in earnest. With a few more casts he soon got into the way of managing the big rod; and every time the flies fell lightly on the other side of the pool, to be dragged with gentle jerks across the foaming current of the stream. Ingram went back to his couch on the rock. He lay and watched the monotonous flinging back of the long rod, the light whistle of the line through the air, and the careful manipulation of the flies through the water. Or was

it something else that he was watching—something that awakened in his mind a sudden sense of surprise and fear, and a new and strange consciousness that he had been guiltily remiss?

Sheila was wholly pre-occupied with her companion and his efforts. He had had one or two rises, but had struck either too soon or too late, until at last there was a terrific plunge and rush, and again the line was whirled out. But Duncan did not like the look of it, somehow. The fish had been sheering off when it was hooked, and the deep plunge at the outset was ugly.

"Now will you take the rod?" said Lavender to Sheila.

But before she could answer, the fish had come rushing up to the surface, had thrown itself out of the water, so that it fell on the opposite bank. It was a splendid animal; and Duncan, despite his doubts, called out to Ingram to slacken his hold. There was another spring into the air, the fish fell with a splash into the water, and the line was flying helplessly aloft, with the two flies floating about.

"Ay," said Duncan, with a sigh, "it wass foul-hooked. It wass no chance of catching him whatever."

Lavender was more successful next time, however, with a pretty little grilse of about half-a-dozen pounds, that seemed to have in him the spirit and fight of a dozen salmon. How he rushed and struggled, how he plunged and sulked, how he burrowed along the banks, and then ran out to the middle of the pool, and then threw himself into the air, with the line apparently but not really doubling up under him—all

these things can only be understood by the fisherman who has played in a Highland stream a wild and powerful little grilse fresh in from the salt-water. And it was Sheila who held him captive—who humoured him when he sulked, and gently guided him away from dangerous places, and kept him well in hand when he tried to cross the current, until, at last, all the fierceness gone out of him, he let himself be tenderly inveigled into the side of the pool, where Duncan, by a dexterous movement, surrounded him with network and placed his shining body among the bright green grass.

But Ingram was not so overjoyed this time. He complimented Sheila in a friendly way; but he was rather grave, and obviously did not care for this business of fishing. And so Sheila, fancying that he was rather dull because he was not joining in the sport, proposed that he should walk back to the house with her, leaving Mr. Lavender with Duncan. And Ingram was quite ready to do so.

But Lavender protested that he cared very little for salmon-fishing. He suggested that they should all go back together. The sun was killing the wind; and soon the pools would be as clear as glass. Had they not better try in the afternoon, when perhaps the breeze would freshen? And so they walked back to the house.

On the garden-seat a book lay open. It was Mr. Mill's "Essay on Liberty;" and it had evidently been left there by Mr. Mackenzie—perhaps, who knows, to hint to his friends from the South that he was familiar with the problems of the age? Lavender winked to

Ingram; but somehow his companion seemed in no humour for a joke.

They had luncheon then; and after luncheon, Ingram touched Lavender on the shoulder and said—

"I want to have a word with you privately. Let's walk down to the shore."

And so they did; and when they had got some little distance from the house, Ingram said—

"Look here, Lavender. I mean to be frank with you. I don't think it fair that you should try to drag Sheila Mackenzie into a flirtation. I knew you would fall in love with her—for a week or two; that does not matter—it harms no one. But I never thought of the chance of her being led into such a thing; for what is a mere passing amusement to you, would be a very serious thing to her."

"Well?"

"Well? Is not that enough? Do you think it fair to take advantage of this girl's ignorance of the world?"

Lavender stopped in the middle of the path and said—

"This may be as well settled at once. You have talked of flirtation and all that sort of thing. You may regard it as you please; but before I leave this island I mean to ask Sheila Mackenzie to be my wife."

"Why, you are mad!" cried Ingram, amazed to see that the young man was perfectly serious.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you mean to say," continued Ingram, "that, even supposing Sheila would consent—which is im-

possible—you would try to take away that girl from her father?"

"Girls must leave their fathers some time or other," said Lavender, somewhat sullenly.

"Not unless they are asked."

"Oh, well, they are sure to be asked, and they are sure to go. If their mothers had not done so before them, where would they be? It's all very well for you to talk about it and argue it out, as a theory; but I know what the facts of the case are, and what any man in my position would do; and I know that I am careless of any consequences so long as I can secure her for my wife."

"Apparently you are—careless of any consequences to herself or those about her."

"But what is your objection, Ingram?" said the young man, suddenly abandoning his defiant manner; "why should you object? Do you think I would make a bad husband to the woman I married?"

"I believe nothing of the sort. I believe you would make a very good husband, if you were to marry a woman whom you knew something about, and whom you had really learned to love and respect through your knowledge of her. I tell you, you know nothing about Sheila Mackenzie as yet. If you were to marry her to-morrow, you would discover in six months she was a woman wholly different from what you had expected."

"Very well, then," said Lavender, with a laugh, "you can't deny this: you think so much of her, that the real woman I would discover must be better than the one I imagine; and so you don't expect I shall be disappointed?"

"If you marry Sheila Mackenzie, you will be disappointed—not through her fault, but your own. Why, a more preposterous notion never entered into a man's head. She knows nothing of your friends or your ways of life; you know nothing of hers. She would be miserable in London, even if you could persuade her father to go with her, which is the most unlikely thing in the world. Do give up this foolish idea, like a good fellow—and do it before Sheila is dragged into a flirtation that may have the most serious consequences to her."

Lavender would not promise; but all that afternoon various resolutions and emotions were struggling within him for mastery, insomuch that Duncan could not understand the blundering way in which he whipped the pools. Mackenzie, Sheila, and Ingram had gone off to pay a visit to an old crone who lived in a neighbouring island, and in whom Ingram had been much interested a few years before; so that Lavender had an opportunity of practising the art of salmon-fishing without interruptions. But all the skill he had shown in the morning seemed to have deserted him; and at last he gave the rod to Duncan, and, sitting down on a top-coat flung on the wet heather, indolently watched the gillie's operations.

Should he at once fly from temptation, and return to London? Would it not be heroic to leave this old man in possession of his only daughter? Sheila would never know of the sacrifice; but what of that? It might be for her happiness that he should go.

But when a young man is in love, or fancies himself in love, with a young girl, it is hard for him to persuade himself that anybody else can make her as

happy as he might. Who could be so tender to her, so watchful over her, as himself? He does not reflect that her parents have had the experience of years in taking care of her, while he would be a mere novice at the business. The pleasure with which he regards the prospect of being constantly with her he transfers to her, and she seems to demand it of him as a duty that he should confer upon her this new happiness.

Lavender met Sheila in the evening, and he was yet undecided. Sometimes he fancied, when their eyes met unexpectedly, that there was something wistful as well as friendly in her look; was she, too, dreaming of the vague possibilities of the future? This was strange, too—that after each of those little chance reveries she seemed to be moved by a resolution to be more than usually affectionate towards her father, and would go round the table and place her hand on his shoulder, and talk to him. Perhaps these things were but delusions begotten of his own imaginings; but the possibility of their being real agitated him not a little, and he scarcely dared to think what might follow.

That evening Sheila sang, and all his half-formed resolutions vanished into air. He sat in a corner of the curious, dimly-lit, and old-fashioned chamber, and, lying back in the chair, abandoned himself to dreams as Sheila sang the mystic songs of the northern coasts. There was something strangely suggestive of the sea in the room itself; and all her songs were of the sea. It was a smaller room than the big apartment in which they had dined; and it was filled with curiosities from distant shores and with the strange captures made by the Borva fishermen. Everywhere, too, were the trophies

of Mackenzie's skill with rod and rifle. Deer's horns, seal-skins, stuffed birds, salmon in glass cases, masses of coral, enormous shells, and a thousand similar things made the little drawing-room a sort of grotto; but it was a grotto within hearing of the sound of the sea, and there was no musty atmosphere in a room that was open all day to the cold winds of the Atlantic.

With a smoking tumbler of whiskey and water before him, the King of Borva sat at the table, poring over a large volume containing plans for bridges. Ingram was seated at the piano, in continual consultation with Sheila about her songs. Lavender, in this dusky corner, lay and listened, with all sorts of fancies crowding in upon him as Sheila sang of the sad and wild legends of her home. Was it by chance, then, he asked himself, that these songs seemed so frequently to be the lamentation of a Highland girl for a fair-haired lover beyond the sea? First of all she sang the "Wail of Dunevegan," and how strangely her voice thrilled with the sadness of the song—

"Morn, oh mantle thy smiles of gladness!
Night, oh come with thy clouds of sadness!
Earth, thy pleasures to me seem madness!
Macleod, my leal love, since thou art gone.
Dunevegan oh! Dunevegan oh!
Dunevegan! Dunevegan!"

It was as in a dream that he heard Ingram talking in a matter-of-fact way about the various airs, and asking the meaning of certain lines of Gaelic to compare them with the stiff and old-fashioned phrases of the translation. Surely this girl must have sat by the shore and waited for her absent lover, or how could she sing with such feeling?

"Say, my love, why didst thou tarry,
Far over the deep sea?

Knew'st thou not my heart was weary,
Heard'st thou not how I sighed for thee?
Did no light wind bear my wild despair
Far over the deep sea?"

He could imagine that beautiful face grown pale and wild with anguish. And then, some day, as she went along the lonely island, with all the light of hope gone out of her eyes, and with no more wistful glances cast across the desolate sea, might not the fair-haired lover come at last, and leap ashore to clasp her in his arms, and hide the wonder-stricken eyes and the glad face in his bosom? But Sheila sang of no such meeting. The girl was always alone; her lover gone away from her across the sea or into the wilds.

"Oh long on the mountain he tarries, he tarries;
Why tarries the youth with the bright yellow hair?
Oh long on the mountain he tarries, he tarries,
Why seeks he the hill when his flock is not there?"

—that was what he heard her sing, until it seemed to him that her singing was a cry to be taken away from these melancholy surroundings of sea and shore, and carried to the secure and comfortable South, to be cherished, and tended, and loved. Why should this girl be left to live a cruel life up in these wilds, and to go through the world without knowing anything of the happy existence that might have been hers? It was well for harder and stronger natures to withstand the buffetings of wind and rain, and to be indifferent to the melancholy influence of the lonely sea, and the darkness of the northern winters; but for her—for this beautiful, sensitive, tender-hearted girl—surely some other and gentler fate was in store. What he, at least, could do, he would. He would lay his life at her feet; and if she chose to go away from this bleak and cruel home to the sunnier South, would not he devote him-

self, as never a man had given himself to a woman before, to the constant duty of enriching her life with all the treasures of admiration, and respect, and love?

It was getting late, and presently Sheila retired. As she bade "Good-night" to him, Lavender fancied her manner was a little less frank towards him than usual, and her eyes were cast down. All the light of the room seemed to go with her when she went.

Mackenzie mixed another tumbler of toddy, and began to expound to Ingram his views upon deer-forests and sheep-farms. Ingram lit a cigar, stretched out his legs, and proceeded to listen with much complacent attention. As for Lavender, he sat a while, hearing vaguely the sounds of his companions' voices; and then, saying he was a trifle tired, he left and went to his own room. The moon was then shining clearly over Suainabhal, and a pathway of glimmering light lay across Loch Roag.

He went to bed, but not to sleep. He had resolved to ask Sheila Mackenzie to be his wife; and a thousand conjectures as to the future were floating about his imagination. In the first place, would she listen to his prayer? She knew nothing of him beyond what she might have heard from Ingram. If she were to ask more, how could Ingram know of the seriousness of the new emotions and resolutions which this brief visit to Lewis had crowded in on his friend? He had had no opportunity, during their friendly talking, of revealing to her what he thought of herself; but might she not have guessed it? Then her father —what action might not this determined old man take in the matter? Would his love for his daughter prompt him to consider her happiness alone? All these things,

however, were mere preliminaries; and the imagination of the young man soon overleapt them. He began to draw pictures of Sheila as his wife—in their London home, among his friends, at Hastings, at Ascot, in Hyde Park. What would people say of the beautiful Sea-Princess with the proud air, the fearless eyes, and the gentle and musical voice? Hour after hour he lay, and could not sleep—a fever of anticipation, of fear and of hope combined, seemed to stir in his blood and throb in his brain. At last, in a paroxysm of unrest, he rose, hastily dressed himself, stole downstairs, and made his way out into the cool air of the night.

It could not be the coming dawn that revealed to him the outlines of the shore, and the mountains, and the loch? The moon had already sunk in the south-west; not from her came that strange clearness by which all these objects were defined. Then the young man bethought him of what Sheila had said of the twilight in these latitudes; and, turning to the north, he saw there a pale glow which looked as if it were the last faint traces of some former sunset. All over the rest of the heavens something of the same metallic clearness reigned, so that the stars were pale, and a grey hue lay over the sea, and over the island, the white bays, the black rocks, and the valleys, in which lay a scarcely perceptible mist.

He left the house and went vaguely down to the sea. The cold air, scented strongly with the sea-weed, blew about him, and was sweet and fresh on the lips and the forehead. How strange was the monotonous sound of the waves—mournful and distant, like the

sound in a sea-shell! That alone spoke in the awful stillness of the night; and it seemed to be telling of those things which the silent stars and the silent hills had looked down on for ages and ages. Did Sheila really love this terrible thing, with its strange voice talking in the night, or did she not secretly dread it, and shudder at it, when she sang of all that old sadness? There was ringing in his ears the "Wail of Dunevegan," as he listened for a while to the melancholy plashing of the waves all around the lonely shores; and there was a cry of "Dunevegan, oh! Dunevegan, oh!" weaving itself curiously with those wild pictures of Sheila in London which were still floating before his imagination.

He walked away around the coast, seeing almost nothing of the objects around him, but conscious of the solemn majesty of the mountains and the stillness of the throbbing stars. He could have called aloud, "Sheila! Sheila!" but that all the place seemed associated with her presence; and might he not turn suddenly to find her figure standing by him, with her face grown wild and pale as it was in the ballad, and a piteous and awful look in her eye? Did the figure accuse him? He scarcely dared look round, lest there should be a phantom Sheila appealing to him for compassion, and complaining against him with her speechless eyes for a wrong that he could not understand. He fled from her, but he knew she was there; and all the love in his heart went out to her as if beseeching her to go away, and forsake him, and forgive him the injury of which she seemed to accuse him. What wrong had he done her that he should be haunted by this spectre, that did not threaten but

only looked piteously towards him, with eyes full of entreaty and pain?

He left the shore, and blindly made his way up to the pasture-land above, careless whither he went. He knew not how long he had been away from the house; but here was a small fresh-water lake set round about with rushes, and far over there in the east lay a glimmer of the channels between Borva and Lewis. But soon there was another light in the east, high over the low mists that lay along the land. A pale blue-grey arose in the cloudless sky, and the stars went out one by one. The mists were seen to lie in thicker folds along the desolate valleys. Then a faintly yellow whiteness stole up into the sky, and broadened and widened, and behold! the little moorland loch caught a reflection of the glare, and there was a streak of crimson here and there on the dark-blue surface of the water. Loch Roag began to brighten. Suainabhal was touched with rose-red on its eastern slopes. The Atlantic seemed to rise out of its purple sleep with the new light of a new dawn; and then there was a chirruping of birds over the heath, and the first shafts of the sunlight ran along the surface of the sea, and lit up the white wavelets that were breaking on the beach. The new day struck upon him with a strange sense of wonder. Where was he? Whither had gone the wild visions of the night, the feverish dread, the horrible forebodings? The strong mental emotion that had driven him out now produced its natural reaction; he looked about in a dazed fashion at the revelation of light around him, and felt himself trembling with weakness. Slowly, blindly, and hopelessly, he set to walk back across the island,

with the sunlight of the fresh morning calling into life ten thousand audible things of the moorland around him.

And who was this who stood at the porch of the house in the clear sunshine? Not the pale and ghastly creature who had haunted him during those wild hours; but Sheila herself, singing some snatches of a song, and engaged in watering the two bushes of sweet-brier at the gate. How bright, and roseate, and happy she looked—with the fine colour of her face lit up by the fresh sunlight; and the brisk breeze from the sea stirring now and again the loose masses of her hair. Haggard and faint as he was, he would have startled her if he had gone up to her then. He dared not approach her. He waited until she had gone round to the gable of the house, to water the plants there; and then he stole into the house, and upstairs, and threw himself upon the bed. And outside he still heard Sheila singing lightly to herself, as she went about her ordinary duties, little thinking in how strange and wild a drama her wraith had that night taken part.

CHAPTER VI.

At Barvas Bridge.

VERY soon, indeed, Ingram began to see that his friend had spoken to him quite frankly; and that he was really bent on asking Sheila to become his wife. Ingram contemplated this prospect with some dismay, and with some vague consciousness that he was himself responsible for what he could not help regarding as a disaster. He had half expected that Frank La-

vender would, in his ordinary fashion, fall in love with Sheila—for about a fortnight. He had joked him about it even before they came within sight of Sheila's home. He had listened with a grim humour to Lavender's outbursts of admiration, and only asked himself how many times he had heard the same phrases before. But now things were looking more serious; for the young man had thrown himself into the prosecution of his new project with all the generous poetic enthusiasm of a highly impulsive nature. Ingram saw that everything a young man could do to win the heart of a young girl Lavender would do; and nature had dowered him richly with various means of fascination. Most dangerous of all of these was a gift of sincerity that deceived himself. He could assume an opinion, or express an emotion, at will, with such a genuine fervour that he himself forgot how recently he had acquired it, and was able to convince his companion for the moment that it was a revelation of his inmost soul. It was this charm of impetuous sincerity which had fascinated Ingram himself years before, and made him cultivate the acquaintance of a young man whom he at first regarded as a somewhat facile, talkative, and histrionic person. Ingram perceived, for example, that young Lavender had so little regard for public affairs that he would have been quite content to see our Indian Empire go for the sake of eliciting a sarcasm from Lord Westbury; but, at the same time, if you had appealed to his nobler instincts, and placed before him the condition of a certain populace suffering from starvation, he would have done all in his power to aid them; he would have written letters to the newspapers, would have

headed subscriptions, and would have ended by believing that he had been the constant friend of the people of India throughout his life, and was bound to stick to them to the end of it.

As often as not Lavender borrowed his fancies and opinions from Edward Ingram himself, who was amused and gratified at the same time to find his humdrum notions receive a dozen new lights and colours when transferred to the warmer atmosphere of his friend's imagination. Ingram would even consent to receive from his younger companion advice, impetuously urged and richly illustrated, which he had himself offered, in simpler terms, months before. At this very moment he could see that much of Lavender's romantic conceptions of Sheila's character was only an exaggeration of some passing hints he, Ingram, had dropped as the *Clansman* was steaming into Stornoway. But then they were ever so much more beautiful. Ingram held to his conviction that he himself was a distinctly commonplace person. He had grown reconciled to the ordinary grooves of life. But young Lavender was not commonplace—he fancied he could see in him an occasional flash of something that looked like genius; and many and many a time, in regarding the brilliant and facile powers, the generous impulses, and the occasional ambitions of his companion, he wondered whether these would ever lead to anything in the way of production, or even of consolidation of character, or whether they would merely remain the passing sensations of an indifferent idler. Sometimes, indeed, he devoutly wished that Lavender had been born a stonemason.

But all these pleasant and graceful qualities which

had made the young man an agreeable companion were a serious danger now; for was it not but too probable that Sheila, accustomed to the rude and homely ways of the islanders, would be attracted, and pleased, and fascinated by one who had about him so much of a soft and southern brightness with which she was wholly unfamiliar? This open-hearted frankness of his placed all his best qualities in the sunshine, as it were; she could not fail to see the singular modesty and courtesy of his bearing towards women, his gentle manners, his light-heartedness, his passionate admiration of the self-sacrifice of others, and his sympathy with their sufferings. Ingram would not have minded much if Lavender alone had been concerned in the dilemma now growing imminent; he would have left him to flounder out of it as he had got out of previous ones. But he had been surprised, and pained, and even frightened to detect in Sheila's manner some faint indications—so faint that he was doubtful what construction to put on them—of a special interest in the young stranger whom he had brought with him to Borva.

What could he do in the matter, supposing his suspicions were correct? Caution Sheila?—it would be an insult. Warn Mackenzie?—the King of Borva would fly into a passion with everybody concerned, and bring endless humiliation on his daughter, who had probably never dreamed of regarding Lavender except as a chance acquaintance. Insist upon Lavender going south at once?—that would merely goad the young man into obstinacy. Ingram found himself in a grievous difficulty, afraid to say how much of it was of his own creation. He had no selfish sentiments of

his own to consult; if it were to become evident that the happiness of Sheila and of his friend depended on their marrying each other, he was ready to forward such a project with all the influence at his command. But there were a hundred reasons why he should dread such a marriage. He had already mentioned several of them to Lavender, in trying to dissuade the young man from his purpose. A few days had passed since then; and it was clear that Lavender had abandoned all notion of fulfilling those resolutions he had vaguely formed. But the more that Ingram thought over the matter, and the further he recalled all the ancient proverbs and stories about the fate of intermeddlers, the more evident it became to him that he could take no immediate action in the affair. He would trust to the chapter of accidents to save Sheila from what he considered a disastrous fate. Perhaps Lavender would repent. Perhaps Mackenzie, continually on the watch for small secrets, would discover something, and bid his daughter stay in Borva while his guests proceeded on their tour through Lewis. In any case, it was not at all certain that Lavender would be successful in his suit. Was the heart of a proud-spirited, intelligent, and busily-occupied girl to be won in a matter of three weeks or a month? Lavender would go south, and no more would be heard of it.

This tour round the island of Lewis, however, was not likely to favour much any such easy escape from the difficulty. On a certain morning the larger of Mr. Mackenzie's boats carried the holiday-party away from Borva; and even at this early stage—as they sat in the stern of the heavy craft—Lavender had arrogated to himself the exclusive right of waiting upon Sheila.

He had constituted himself her companion in all their excursions about Borva which they had undertaken; and now, on this longer journey, they were to be once more thrown together. It did seem a little hard that Ingram should be relegated to Mackenzie and his theories of government; but did he not profess to prefer that? Like most men who have got beyond five-and-thirty, he was rather proud of considering himself an observer of life. He stood aside as a spectator, and let other people, engaged in all manner of eager pursuits, pass before him for review. Towards young folks, indeed, he assumed a good-naturedly paternal air, as if they were but as shy-faced children to be humoured. Were not their love-affairs a pretty spectacle? As for himself, he was far beyond all that. The illusions of love-making, the devotion, and ambition, and dreams of courtship, were no longer possible to him; but did they not constitute on the whole a beautiful and charming study, that had about it at times some little touches of pathos? At odd moments, when he saw Sheila and Lavender walking together in the evening, he was himself half inclined to wish that something might come of the young man's determination. It would be so pleasant to play the part of a friendly counsellor, to humour the follies of the young folks, to make jokes at their expense, and then, in the midst of their embarrassment and resentment, to go forward, and pet them a little, and assure them of a real and earnest sympathy.

"Your time is to come," Lavender said to him suddenly, after he had been exhibiting some of his paternal forbearance and consideration; "you will get a dreadful twist some day, my boy. You have been

doing nothing but dreaming about women; but some day or other you will wake up to find yourself captured and fascinated beyond anything you have ever seen in other people, and then you will discover what a desperately real thing it is."

Ingram had a misty impression that he had heard something like this before. Had he not given Lavender some warning of the same kind? But he was so much accustomed to hear those vague repetitions of his own remarks—and was, on the whole, so well pleased to think that his commonplace notions should take root and flourish in this goodly soil—that he never thought of asking Lavender to quote his authority for those profound observations on men and things.

"Now, Miss Mackenzie," said the young man, as the big boat was drawing near to Callernish, "what is to be our first sketch in Lewis?"

"The Callernish stones, of course," said Mackenzie himself; "it iss more than one hass come to the Lewis to see the Callernish stones."

Lavender had promised to the King of Borva a series of water-colour drawings of Lewis, and Sheila was to choose the subjects from day to day. Mackenzie was gratified by this proposal, and accepted it with much magnanimity; but Sheila knew that, before the offer was made, Lavender had come to her and asked her if she cared about sketches, and whether he might be allowed to take a few on this journey and present them to her. She was very grateful; but suggested that it might please her papa if they were given to him. Would she superintend them, then, and choose the topics for illustration? Yes, she would do that;

and so the young man was furnished with a roving commission.

He brought her a little sepia sketch of Borvabost, its huts, its bay, and its upturned boats on the beach. Sheila's expressions of praise—the admiration and pleasure that shone in her eyes—would have turned any young man's head. But her papa looked at the picture with a critical eye, and remarked—

"Oh yes, it is ferry good—but it is not the colour of Loch Roag at all. It is the colour of a river when there is a flood of rain—I have neffer at all seen Loch Roag a brown colour—neffer at all."

It was clear, then, that the subsequent sketches could not be taken in sepia; and so Lavender proposed to make a series of pencil drawings, which could be washed in with colour afterwards. There was one subject, indeed, which, since his arrival in Lewis, he had tried to fix on paper by every conceivable means in his power—and that was Sheila herself. He had spoiled innumerable sheets of paper in trying to get some likeness of her which would satisfy himself; but all his usual skill seemed somehow to have gone from him. He could not understand it. In ordinary circumstances, he could have traced in a dozen lines a portrait that would at least have shown a superficial likeness—he could have multiplied portraits by the dozen of old Mackenzie, or Ingram, or Duncan—but here he seemed to fail utterly. He invited no criticism, certainly. These efforts were made in his own room; and he asked no one's opinion as to the likeness. He could, indeed, certify to himself that the drawing of the features was correct enough. There was the sweet and placid forehead, with its low masses of dark hair;

there the short upper lip, the finely-carved mouth, the beautifully-rounded chin and throat; and there the frank, clear, proud eyes, with their long lashes and highly-curved eyebrows. Sometimes, too, a touch of colour added warmth to the complexion, put a glimmer of the blue sea beneath the long black eyelashes, and drew a thread of scarlet round the white neck. But was this Sheila? Could he take this sheet of paper to his friends in London, and say—Here is the magical Princess whom I hope to bring to you from the North, with all the glamour of the sea around her? He felt instinctively that there would be an awkward pause. The people would praise the handsome, frank, courageous head, and look upon the bit of red ribbon round the neck as an effective artistic touch. They would hand him back the paper with a compliment; and he would find himself in an agony of unrest because they had misunderstood the portrait, and seen nothing of the wonder that encompassed this Highland girl as if with a garment of mystery and dreams.

So he tore up portrait after portrait—more than one of which would have startled Ingram by its truth; and then, to prove to himself that he was not growing mad, he resolved to try a portrait of some other person. He drew a head of old Mackenzie in chalk; and was amazed with the rapidity and facility with which he executed the task. There could be no doubt as to the success of the likeness nor as to the effect of the picture. The King of Borva, with his heavy eyebrows, his aquiline nose, his keen grey eyes, and flowing beard, offered a fine subject; and there was something really royal, and massive, and noble in the head that Lavender, well satisfied with his work, took downstairs

one evening. Sheila was alone in the drawing-room, turning over some music.

"Miss Mackenzie," he said, rather kindly, "would you look at this?"

Sheila turned round, and the sudden light of pleasure that leapt to her face was all the praise and all the assurance he wanted. But he had more than that. The girl was grateful to him beyond all the words she could utter, and when he asked her if she would accept the picture, she thanked him by taking his hand for a moment, and then she left the room to call in Ingram and her father. All the evening there was a singular look of happiness on her face. When she met Lavender's eyes with hers, there was a frank and friendly look of gratitude ready to reward him. When had he earned so much before by a simple sketch? Many and many a portrait, carefully executed and elaborately framed, had he presented to his lady-friends in London, to receive from them a pretty note and a few words of thanks when next he called. Here, with a rough chalk sketch, he had awakened an amount of gratitude that almost surprised him in the most beautiful and tender soul in the world; and had not this princess among women taken his hand for a moment, as a childlike way of expressing her thanks, while her eyes spoke more than her lips? And the more he looked at those eyes, the more he grew to despair of ever being able to put down the magic of them in lines and colours.

At length Duncan got the boat into the small creek at Callernish; and the party got out on the shore. As they were going up the steep path leading to the plain above, a young girl met them, who looked at them in

rather a strange way. She had a fair, pretty, wondering face, with singularly high eyebrows, and clear, light blue eyes.

"How are you, Eilean?" said Mackenzie, as he passed on with Ingram.

But Sheila, on making the same inquiry, shook hands with the girl, who smiled in a confidential way, and, coming quite close, nodded, and pointed down to the water's edge.

"Have you seen them to-day, Eilean?" said Sheila, still holding the girl by the hands, and looking at the fair, pretty, strange face.

"It wass sa day before yesterday," she answered, in a whisper, while a pleased smile appeared on her face, "and sey will be here sa night."

"Good-bye, Eilean; take care you don't stay out at night and catch cold, you know," said Sheila; and then, with another little nod and a smile, the young girl went down the path.

"It is Eilean-of-the-Ghosts, as they call her," said Sheila to Lavender as they went on; "the poor thing fancies she sees little people about the rocks, and watches for them. But she is very good and quiet, and she is not afraid of them, and she does no harm to anyone. She does not belong to the Lewis; I think she is from Jura; but she sometimes comes to pay us a visit at Borva, and my papa is very kind to her."

"Mr. Ingram does not appear to know her; I thought he was acquainted with everyone in the island," said Lavender.

"She was not here when he has been in the Lewis before," said Sheila; "but Eilean does not like to speak

to strangers, and I do not think you could get her to speak to you if you tried."

Lavender had paid but little attention to the "false men" of Callernish when first he saw them; but now he approached the long lines of big stones up on this lonely plateau with a new interest. For Sheila had talked to him about them many a time in Borva; and had asked his opinion about their origin and their age. Was the central circle of stones an altar, with the other series marking the approaches to it? Or was it the grave of some great chieftain, with the remaining stones indicating the graves of his relations and friends? Or was it the commemoration of some battle in olden times, or the record of astronomical or geometrical discoveries, or a temple once devoted to serpent-worship, or what? Lavender, who knew absolutely nothing at all about the matter, was probably as well qualified as anybody else to answer those questions; but he forbore. The interest, however, that Sheila showed in such things he very rapidly acquired. When he came to see the rows of stones a second time, he was much impressed by their position on this bit of hill overlooking the sea. He sat down on his camp-stool with the determination that, although he could not satisfy Sheila's wistful questions, he would present her with some little sketch of these monuments and their surroundings, which might catch up something of the mysterious loneliness of the scene.

He would not, of course, have the picture as it then presented itself. The sun was glowing on the grass around him, and lighting up the tall grey pillars of stone with a cheerful radiance. Over there the waters of Loch Roag were bright and blue; and beyond

the lake the undulations of moorland were green and beautiful, and the mountains in the south grown pale as silver in the heat. Here was a pretty young lady, in a rough blue travelling dress, and a hat and feather, who was engaged in picking up wild-flowers from the warm heath. There was a gentleman from the office of the Board of Trade, who was sitting on the grass, nursing his knees, and whistling. From time to time the chief figure in the foreground was an elderly gentleman, who evidently expected that he was going to be put into the picture, and who was occasionally dropping a cautious hint that he did not always wear this rough-and-ready sailor's costume. Mackenzie was also most anxious to point out to the artist the names of the hills and districts lying to the south of Loch Roag; apparently with the hope that the sketch would have a certain typographical interest for future visitors.

No; Lavender was content at that moment to take down the outlines of the great stones, and the configuration of lake and hill beyond; but by and by, he would give another sort of atmosphere to this wild scene. He would have rain and darkness spread over the island, with the low hills in the south grown desolate and remote, and the waters of the sea covered with gloom. No human figure should be visible on this remote plain, where these strange memorials had stood for centuries, exposed to western gales, and the stillness of the winter nights, and the awful silence of the stars. Would not Sheila, at least, understand the bleakness and desolation of the picture? Of course her father would like to have everything blue and green. He seemed a little disappointed when it was

clear that no distant glimpse of Borva could be introduced into the sketch. But Sheila's imagination would be captured by this sombre picture; and perhaps, by and by, in some other land, amid fairer scenes and in a more generous climate, she might be less inclined to hunger for the dark and melancholy North when she looked on this record of its gloom and its sadness.

"Iss he going to put any people in the pictures?" said Mackenzie, in a confidential whisper to Ingram.

Ingram got up from the grass, and said, with a yawn—

"I don't know. If he does, it will be afterwards. Suppose we go along to the waggonette, and see if Duncan has brought everything up from the boat?"

The old man seemed rather unwilling to be cut out of this particular sketch, but he went, nevertheless; and Sheila, seeing Mr. Lavender left alone, and thinking that not quite fair, went over to him, and asked if she might be permitted to see as much as he had done.

Lavender shut up the book.

"No," he said with a laugh, "you shall see it to-night. I have sufficient memoranda to work something out of it by and by. Shall we have another look at the circle up there?"

He folded up and shouldered his camp-stool, and they walked to the point at which the long lines of the "mourners" converged. Perhaps he was moved by a great antiquarian curiosity; at all events, he showed a singular interest in the monuments, and talked to his companion about all the possible theories connected with such stones in a fashion that charmed

her greatly. She was easily persuaded that the Callernish "Fir-Bhreige" were the most interesting relics in the world. He had seen Stonehenge, but Stonehenge was too scattered to be impressive. There was more mystery about the means by which the inhabitants of a small island could have hewn, and carved, and erected these blocks; there was, moreover, the mystery about the vanished population itself. Yes, he had been to Carnac also. He had driven down from Auray in a rumbling old trap, his coachman being unable to talk French. He had seen the half-cultivated plain on which there were rows and rows of small stones, scarcely to be distinguished from the stone walls of the adjoining farms. What was there impressive about such a sight, when you went into a house and paid a franc to be shown the gold ornaments picked up about the place? Here, however, was a perfect series of those strange memorials, with the long lanes leading up to a circle, and the tallest of all the stones placed on the western side of the circle, perhaps as the headstone of the buried chief. Look at the position, too—the silent hill, the waters of the sea-loch around it, and beyond that the desolation of miles of untenanted moorland. Sheila seemed pleased that her companion, after coming so far, should have found something worth looking at in the Lewis.

"Does it not seem strange," he said, suddenly, "to think of young folks of the present day picking up wild-flowers from among those old stones?"

He was looking at a tiny bouquet which she had gathered.

"Will you take them?" she said, quite simply and

naturally offering him the flowers. "They may remind you some time of Callernish."

He took the flowers, and regarded them for a moment in silence; and then he said gently—

"I do not think I shall want these to remind me of Callernish. I shall never forget our being here."

At this moment—perhaps fortunately—Duncan appeared, and came along towards the young people with a basket in his hand.

"It wass Mr. Mackenzie will ask if ye will tek a glass o' whiskey, sir, and a bit o' bread and cheese. And he wass sayin' there wass no hurry at all, and he will wait for you two hours, or half an hour whatever."

"All right, Duncan; go back and tell him I have finished, and we shall be there directly. No, thank you, don't take out the whiskey—unless, Miss Mackenzie," added the young man, with a smile, "Duncan can persuade you."

Duncan looked with amazement at the man who dared to joke about Miss Sheila taking whiskey; and, without waiting for any further commands, indignantly shut the lid of the basket, and walked off.

"I wonder, Miss Mackenzie," said Lavender, as they went along the path and down the hill, "I wonder what you would say if I happened to call you Sheila by mistake."

"I should be glad if you did that. Everyone calls me Sheila," said the girl, quietly enough.

"You would not be vexed?" he said, regarding her with a little surprise.

"No, why should I be vexed?" she answered, and

she happened to look up, and he saw what a clear light of sincerity there was shining in her eyes.

"May I then call you Sheila?"

"Yes."

"But—but—" he said, with a timidity and embarrassment of which she showed no trace whatever, "but people might think it strange, you know—and yet I should greatly like to call you Sheila—only, not before other people, perhaps—"

"But why not?" she said, with her eyebrows just raised a little. "Why should you wish to call me Sheila at one time and not at the other? It is no difference whatever—and everyone calls me Sheila."

Lavender was a little disappointed. He had hoped, when she consented in so friendly a manner to his calling her by any name he chose, that he could have established this little arrangement, which would have had about it something of the nature of a personal confidence. Sheila would evidently have none of that. Was it that she was really so simple and frank in her ways that she did not understand why there should be such a difference, and what it might imply; or was she well aware of everything he had been wishing, and able to assume this air of simplicity and ignorance with a perfect grace? Ingram, he reflected, would have said at once that to suspect Sheila of such duplicity was to insult her; but then Ingram was perhaps himself a trifle too easily imposed on, and he had notions about women—despite all his philosophical reading and such like—that a little more mingling in society might have caused him to alter. Frank Lavender confessed to himself that Sheila was either a miracle of ingenuousness or a thorough mistress of the art of

assuming it. On the one hand, he considered it almost impossible for a woman to be so ingenuous; on the other hand, how could this girl have taught herself, in the solitude of a savage island, a species of histrionicism which women in London circles strove for years to acquire and rarely acquired in any perfection? At all events, he said to himself, while he reserved his opinion on this point, he was not going to call Sheila Sheila before folks who would know what that meant. Mr. Mackenzie was evidently a most irascible old gentleman. Goodness only knew what sort of law prevailed in these wild parts; and to be seized at midnight by a couple of brawny fishermen—to be carried down to a projecting ledge of rock——! Had not Ingram already hinted that Mackenzie would straightway throw into Loch Roag the man who should offer to carry away Sheila from him?

But how could these doubts of Sheila's sincerity last? He sat opposite her in the waggonette, and the perfect truth of her face, of her frank eyes, and of her ready smile met him at every moment, whether he talked to her, or to Ingram, or listened to old Mackenzie, who turned from time to time from the driving of the horses to inform the stranger of what he saw around him. It was the most brilliant of mornings. The sun burned on the white road, on the green moorland, on the grey-lichened rocks with their crimson patches of heather. As they drove by the curious convolutions of this rugged coast, the sea that lay beyond these recurring bays and points was of a windy green, with here and there a streak of white, and the fresh breeze blowing across to them tempered

the fierce heat of the sun. How cool, too, were those little fresh-water lakes they passed—the clear blue and white of them stirred into wavelets that moved the reeds and left air-bubbles about the half-submerged stones. Were not those wild geese over there, flapping in the water with their huge wings, and taking no notice of the passing strangers? Lavender had never seen this lonely coast in times of gloom, with those little lakes become sombre pools, and the outline of the rocks beyond lost in the driving mist of the sea and the rain. It was altogether a bright and beautiful world he had got into, and there was in it but one woman, beautiful beyond his dreams. To doubt her, was to doubt all women. When he looked at her he forgot the caution, and distrust, and sardonic self-complacency his southern training had given him. He believed; and the world seemed to be filled with a new light.

"That is Loch-na-muil'ne," Mackenzie was saying, "and it iss the Loch of the Mill; and over there that is Loch-a-Bhaile, and that iss the Loch of the Town; but where iss the town now? It wass many hundreds of years before there will be numbers of people in this place, and you will come to *Dun Charlobhaidh*, which is a great castle, by and by. And what wass it will drive away the people, and leave the land to the moss, but that there wass no one to look after them? '*When the natives will leave Islay, farewell to the peace of Scotland*'—that iss a good proverb. And if they have no one to mind them, they will go away altogether. And there is no people more obedient than the people of the Highlands—not anywhere; for you know that we say, '*Is it truth, as if you were*

speaking before kings?' And now there is the castle —and there wass many people living here when they could build that."

It was, in truth, one of those circular forts, the date of which has given rise to endless conjecture and discussion. Perched up on a hill, it overlooked a number of deep and narrow valleys, that ran landward; while the other side of the hill sloped down to the sea-shore. It was a striking object, this tumbling mass of dark stones standing high over the green hollows, and over the light plain of the sea. Was there not here material for another sketch for Sheila? While Lavender had gone away over the heights and hollows to choose his point of view, a rough-and-ready luncheon had been spread out in the waggonette; and when he returned, perspiring and considerably blown, he found old Mackenzie measuring out equal portions of peat-water and whiskey, Duncan flicking the enormous "clegs" from off the horses' necks, Ingram trying to persuade Sheila to have some sherry out of a flask he carried, and everybody in very good spirits over such an exciting event as a roadside luncheon on a summer forenoon.

The King of Borva had by this time become excellent friends with the young stranger who had ventured into his dominions. When the old gentleman had sufficiently impressed on everybody that he had observed all necessary precaution in studying the character and inquiring into the antecedents of Lavender, he could not help confessing to a sense of lightness and vivacity that the young man seemed to bring with him and shed around him. Nor was this matter of the sketches the only thing that had par-

ticularly recommended Lavender to the old man. Mackenzie had a most distinct dislike to Gaelic songs. He could not bear the monotonous melancholy of them. When Sheila, sitting by herself, would sing these strange old ballads of an evening, he would suddenly enter the room, probably find her eyes filled with tears, and then he would in his inmost heart devote the whole of Gaelic minstrelsy and all its authors to the infernal gods. Why should people be for ever saddening themselves with the stories of other folks' misfortunes? It was bad enough for those poor people; but they had borne their sorrows, and died, and were at peace. Surely it was better that we should have songs about ourselves—drinking or fighting, if you like, to keep up the spirits—to lighten the serious cares of life, and drown for a while the responsibility of looking after a whole population of poor, half-ignorant, unphilosophical creatures.

"Look, now," he would say, speaking of his own tongue, "look at this teffle of a language! It has no present tense to its verbs—the people they are always looking forward to a melancholy future, or looking back to a melancholy past. In the name of Kott, hef we not got ourselves to live? This day we live in is better than any day that wass before or iss to come, bekass it is here, and we are alive. And I will hef no more of these songs about crying, and crying, and crying!"

Now Sheila and Lavender, in their mutual musical confidences, had at an early period discovered that each of them knew something of the older English duets, and forthwith they tried a few of them, to Mackenzie's extreme delight. Here, at last, was a sort

of music he could understand—none of your moanings of widows, and cries of luckless girls to the sea—but good common-sense songs, in which the lads kissed the lasses with a will, and had a good drink afterwards, and a dance on the green on their homeward way. There was fun in those happy May-fields, and good health and briskness in the ale-house choruses, and throughout them all a prevailing cheerfulness and contentment with the conditions of life certain to recommend itself to the contemplative mind. Mackenzie never tired of hearing those simple ditties. He grew confidential with the young man; and told him that those fine, common-sense songs recalled pleasant scenes to him. He himself knew something of English village-life. When he had been up to see the Great Exhibition, he had gone to visit a friend living in Brighton, and he had surveyed the country with an observant eye. He had remarked several village-greens, with the May-poles standing here and there in front of the cottages, emblazoned with beautiful banners. He had, it is true, fancied that the May-pole should be in the centre of the green; but the manner in which the waves of population swept here and there, swallowing up open spaces and so forth, would account to a philosophical person for the fact that the May-poles were now close to the village-shops.

"*Drink to me only with thine eyes*," hummed the King of Borva to himself, as he sent the two little horses along the coast-road on this warm summer day. He had heard the song for the first time on the previous evening; he had no voice to speak of; he had missed the air, and these were all the words he remembered; but it was a notable compliment all the

same to the young man who had brought these pleasant tunes to the island. And so they drove on through the keen salt air, with the sea shining beside them, and the sky shining over them; and in the afternoon they arrived at the small, remote, and solitary inn of Barvas, placed near the confluence of several rivers that flow through Loch Barvas, or Barabhas, to the sea. Here they proposed to stop the night; so Lavender, when his room had been assigned to him, begged to be left alone for an hour or two, that he might throw a little colour into his sketch of Callernish. What was there to see at Barvas? Why, nothing but the channels of the brown streams, some pasture-land, and a few huts, then the unfrequented lake, and beyond that some ridges of white sand, standing over the shingly beach of the sea. He would join them at dinner. Mackenzie protested in a mild way; he really wanted to see how the island was to be illustrated by the stranger. There was a greater protest, mingled with compassion and regret, in Sheila's eyes; but the young man was firm. So they let him have his way, and gave him full possession of the common sitting-room, while they set off to visit the school, and the Free-Church manse, and what not in the neighbourhood.

Mackenzie had ordered dinner at eight, to show that he was familiar with the ways of civilized life; and when they returned at that hour, Lavender had two sketches finished.

"Yes, they are very good," said Ingram, who was seldom enthusiastic about his friend's work.

But old Mackenzie was so vastly pleased with the picture which represented his native place in the

brightest of sunshine and colours, that he forgot to assume a critical air. He said nothing against the rainy and desolate version of the scene that had been given to Sheila; it was good enough to please the child. But here was something brilliant, effective, cheerful; and he alarmed Lavender not a little by proposing to get one of the natives to carry this treasure, then and there, back to Borvabost. Both sketches were ultimately returned to his book; and then Sheila helped him to remove his artistic apparatus from the table on which their plain and homely meal was to be placed. As she was about to follow her father and Ingram, who had left the room, she paused for a moment and said to Lavender, with a look of frank gratitude in her eyes—

"It is very good of you to have pleased my papa so much. I know when he is pleased, though he does not speak of it; and it is not often he will be so much pleased."

"And you, Sheila?" said the young man, unconscious of the familiarity he was using, and only remembering that she had scarcely thanked him for the other sketch.

"Well, there is nothing that will please me so much as to see him pleased," she said, with a smile.

He was about to open the door for her; but he kept his hand on the handle, and said, earnestly enough—

"But that is such a small matter—an hour's work. If you only knew how gladly I would live all my life here if only I could do you some greater service——"

She looked a little surprised, and then, for one

brief second, reflected. English was not wholly familiar to her—perhaps she had failed to catch what he really meant. But at all events she said, gravely and simply—

"You would soon tire of living here; it is not always a holiday."

And then, without lifting her eyes to his face, she turned to the door; and he opened it for her, and she was gone.

It was about ten o'clock when they went outside for their evening stroll; and all the world had grown enchanted since they had seen it in the colours of the sunset. There was no night; but a strange clearness over the sky and the earth, and down in the south the moon was rising over the Barvas hills. In the dark green meadows the cattle were still grazing. Voices of children could be heard in the far distance, with the rumble of a cart coming through the silence, and the murmur of the streams flowing down to the loch. The loch itself lay like a line of dusky yellow in a darkened hollow near the sea, having caught on its surface the pale glow of the northern heavens, where the sun had gone down hours before. The air was warm, and yet fresh with the odours of the Atlantic; and there was a scent of Dutch clover coming across from the sandy pastures nearer the coast. The huts of the small hamlet could but faintly be made out beyond the dark and low-lying pastures; but a long, pale line of blue smoke lay in the motionless air, and the voices of the children told of open doors. Night after night, this same picture, with slight variations of position, had been placed before the stranger who had come to view these solitudes

and night after night it seemed to him to grow more beautiful. He could put down on paper the outlines of an every-day landscape, and give them a dash of brilliant colour to look well on a wall; but how to carry away, except in the memory, any impression of the strange lambent darkness, the tender hues, the loneliness and the pathos of those northern twilights?

They walked down by the side of one of the streams towards the sea. But Sheila was not his companion on this occasion. Her father had laid hold of him, and was expounding to him the rights of capitalists and various other matters. But, by and by, Lavender drew his companion on to talk of Sheila's mother; and here, at least, Mackenzie was neither tedious nor ridiculous, nor unnecessarily garrulous. It was with a strange interest that the young man heard the elderly man talk of his courtship, his marriage, the character of his wife, and her goodness and beauty. Was it not like looking at a former Sheila; and would not this Sheila now walking before him go through the same tender experiences, and be admired, and loved, and petted by everybody as this other girl had been, who brought with her the charm of winning ways and a gentle nature into these rude wilds? It was the first time he had heard Mackenzie speak of his wife, and it turned out to be the last; but from that moment the older man had something of dignity in the eyes of this younger man, who had merely judged of him by his little foibles and eccentricities, and would have been ready to dismiss him contemptuously as a buffoon. There was something, then, behind that powerful face, with its deep-cut lines, its heavy eyebrows, and piercing and sometimes sad eyes,

besides a mere liking for tricks of childish diplomacy? Lavender began to have some respect for Sheila's father; and made a resolution to guard against the impertinence of humouring him too ostentatiously.

Was it not hard, though, that Ingram, who was so cold and unimpressionable, who smiled at the notion of marrying, and who was probably enjoying his pipe quite as much as Sheila's familiar talk, should have the girl all to himself on this witching night? They reached the shores of the Atlantic. There was not a breath of wind coming in from the sea; but the air seemed even sweeter and cooler as they sat down on the great bank of shingle. Here and there birds were calling, and Sheila could distinguish each one of them. As the moon rose, a faint golden light began to tremble here and there on the waves, as if some subterranean caverns were lit up and sending to the surface faint and fitful rays of their splendour. Further along the coast the tall banks of sand grew white in the twilight; and the outlines of the dark pasture-land behind grew more distinct.

But when they rose to go back to Barvas, the moonlight had grown full and clear; and the long and narrow loch had a pathway of gold across, stretching from the reeds and sedges of the one side to the reeds and sedges of the other. And now Ingram had gone on to join Mackenzie, and Sheila walked behind with Lavender, and her face was pale and beautiful in the moonlight.

"I shall be very sorry when I have to leave Lewis," he said, as they walked along the path leading through the sand and the clover; and there could be no doubt that he felt the regret expressed in the words.

"But it is no use to speak of leaving us yet," said Sheila, cheerfully; "it is a long time before you will go away from the Lewis."

"And I fancy I shall always think of the island just as it is now—with the moonlight over there, and a loch near, and you walking through the stillness. We have had so many evening walks like this."

"You will make us very vain of our island," said the girl, with a smile, "if you will speak like that always to us. Is there no moonlight in England? I have pictures of English scenery that will be far more beautiful than any we have here; and if there is the moon here, it will be there too. Think of the pictures of the river Thames that my papa showed you last night——"

"Oh, but there is nothing like this in the South," said the young man, impetuously; "I do not believe there is in the world anything so beautiful as this. Sheila, what would you say if I resolved to come and live here always?"

"I should like that very much more than you would like it, perhaps," she said, with a bright laugh.

"That would please you better than for you to go always and live in England, would it not?"

"But that is impossible," she said. "My papa would never think of living in England."

For some time after he was silent. The two figures in front of them walked steadily on; an occasional roar of laughter from the deep chest of Mackenzie startling the night air, and telling of Ingram's being in a communicative mood. At last Lavender said—

"It seems to me so great a pity that you should live in this remote place, and have so little amusement

and see so few people of tastes and education like your own. Your papa is so much occupied—he is so much older than you, too—that you must be left to yourself so much; whereas, if you had a companion of your own age, who could have the right to talk frankly to you, and go about with you, and take care of you——"

By this time they had reached the little wooden bridge crossing the stream: and Mackenzie and Ingram had got to the inn, where they stood in front of the door in the moonlight. Before ascending the steps of the bridge, Lavender, without pausing in his speech, took Sheila's hand, and said suddenly—

"Now don't let me alarm you, Sheila, but suppose at some distant day—as far away as you please—I came and asked you to let me be your companion, then and always, wouldn't you try?"

She looked up with a startled glance of fear in her eyes, and withdrew her hand from him.

"No, don't be frightened," he said, quite gently. "I don't ask you for any promise. Sheila; you must know I love you—you must have seen it. Will you not let me come to you at some future time—a long way off—that you may tell me then? Won't you try to do that?"

There was more in the tone of his voice than in his words. The girl stood irresolute for a second or two, regarding him with a strange, wistful, earnest look; and then a great gentleness came into her eyes, and she put out her hand to him, and said, in a low voice—

"Perhaps!"

But there was something so grave and simple

about her manner at this moment that he dared not somehow receive it as a lover receives the first admission of love from the lips of a maiden. There had been something of a strange inquiry in her face as she regarded him for a second or two; and now that her eyes were bent on the ground, it seemed to him that she was trying to realize the full effect of the concession she had made. He would not let her think. He took her hand and raised it respectfully to his lips, and then he led her forward to the bridge. Not a word was spoken between them while they crossed the shining space of moonlight to the shadow of the house; and as they went indoors he caught but one glimpse of her eyes, and they were friendly and kind towards him, but evidently troubled. He saw her no more that night.

So he had asked Sheila to be his wife; and she had given him some timid encouragement as to the future. Many a time, within these last few days, had he sketched out an imaginative picture of the scene. He was familiar with the passionate rapture of lovers on the stage, in books, and in pictures; and he had described himself (to himself) as intoxicated with joy, anxious to let the whole world know of his good fortune, and above all to confide the tidings of his happiness to his constant friend and companion. But now, as he sat in one corner of the room, he almost feared to be spoken to by the two men who sat at the table with steaming glasses before them. He dared not tell Ingram; he had no wish to tell him, even if he had got him alone. And as he sat there and recalled the incident that had just occurred by the side of the little bridge, he could not wholly understand

its meaning. There had been none of the eagerness, the coyness, the tumult of joy he had expected; all he could remember clearly was the long look that the large, earnest, troubled eyes had fixed upon him, while the girl's face, grown pale in the moonlight, seemed somehow ghostlike and strange.

CHAPTER VII.

An Intermeddler.

But in the morning all these idle fancies fled with the life and colour and freshness of a new day. Loch Barvas was ruffled into a dark blue by the westerly wind; and doubtless the sea out there was rushing in, green and cold, to the shore. The sunlight was warm about the house. The trout were leaping in the shallow brown streams; and here and there a white butterfly fluttered across the damp meadows. Was not that Duncan down by the river, accompanied by Ingram? There was a glimmer of a rod in the sunshine; the two poachers were after trout for Sheila's breakfast.

Lavender dressed, went outside, and looked about for the nearest way down to the stream. He wished to have a chance of saying a word to his friend before Sheila or her father should appear. And at last he thought he could do no better than go across to the bridge, and so make his way down the banks of the river.

What a fresh morning it was, with all sorts of sweet scents in the air! And here, sure enough, was a pretty picture in the early light—a young girl coming over the bridge carrying a load of green grass on her

back. What would she say if he asked her to stop for a moment that he might sketch her pretty costume? Her head-dress was a scarlet handkerchief, tied behind; she wore a tight-fitting bodice of cream-white flannel, and petticoats of grey flannel; while she had a waist-belt and pouch of brilliant blue. Did she know of these harmonies of colour, or of the picturesqueness of her appearance as she came across the bridge in the sunlight? As she drew near she stared at the stranger with the big, dumb eyes of a wild animal. There was no fear, only a sort of surprised observation in them. And as she passed, she uttered, without a smile, some brief and laconic salutation in Gaelic, which, of course, the young man could not understand. He raised his cap, however, and said, "Good morning!" and went on, with a fixed resolve to learn all the Gaelic that Duncan could teach him.

Surely the tall keeper was in excellent spirits this morning. Long before he drew near, Lavender could hear, in the stillness of the morning, that he was telling stories about John the Piper and of his adventures in such distant parts as Portree, and Oban, and even in Glasgow.

"And it wass Allan M'Gillivray, of Styornoway," Duncan was saying, as he industriously whipped the shallow runs of the stream, "will go to Glasgow with John; and they went through ta Crinan Canal. Wass you through ta Crinan Canal, sir?"

"Many a time."

"Ay, jist that. And I hef been told it iss like a river with ta sides o' ta house to it; and what would Allan care for a thing like that, when he hass been to America more than twice or four times? And it wass

when he fell into the canal, he was ferry nearly trooned for all that; and when they pulled him to ta shore, he wass a ferry angry man. And this iss what John says that Allan will say when he wass on the side of the canal: '*Kott*,' says he, '*if I wass trooned here I would show my face in Styornoway no more!*' But perhaps it iss not true; for he will tell many lies, does John the Piper, to hef a laugh at a man."

"The Crinan Canal is not to be despised, Duncan," said Ingram, who was sitting on the red sand of the bank, "when you are in it."

"And do you know what John says that Allan will say to him the first time they went ashore at Glasgow?"

"I am sure I don't."

"It wass many years ago, before that Allan will be going many times to America, and he will neffer hef seen such fine shops, and ta big houses, and hundreds and hundreds of people, everyone with shoes on their feet. And he will say to John, '*John, ef I had known in time, I should hef been born here.*' But no one will believe it iss true; he is such a teffle of a liar, that John; and he will hef some stories about Mr. Mackenzie himself, as I hef been told, that he will tell when he goes to Styornoway. But John is a ferry cunning fellow, and will not tell any such stories in Borva."

"I suppose if he did, Duncan, you would dip him in Loch Roag?"

"Oh, there iss more than one," said Duncan, with a grim twinkle in his eye, "there iss more than one that would hef a joke with him, if he wass to tell stories about Mr. Mackenzie."

Lavender had been standing listening, unknown

to both. He now went forward, and bade them good morning; and then, having had a look at the trout that Duncan had caught, pulled Ingram up from the bank, put his arm in his, and walked away with him.

"Ingram," he said, suddenly, with a laugh and a shrug, "you know I always come to you when I'm in a fix."

"I suppose you do," said the other, "and you are always welcome to whatever help I can give you. But sometimes it seems to me you rush into fixes, with the sort of notion that I am responsible for getting you out."

"I can assure you nothing of the kind is the case. I could not be so ungrateful. However—in the meantime—that is—the fact is, I asked Sheila last night if she would marry me——"

"The devil you did!"

Ingram dropped his companion's arm, and stood looking at him.

"Well, I knew you would be angry," said the younger man, in a tone of apology. "And I know I have been too precipitate; but I thought of the short time we should be remaining here, and of the difficulty of getting an explanation made at another time, and it was really only to give her a hint as to my own feelings that I spoke. I could not bear to wait any longer——"

"Never mind about yourself," said Ingram, somewhat curtly; "what did Sheila say?"

"Well, nothing definite. What could you expect a girl to say after so short an acquaintance? But this I can tell you, that the proposal is not altogether distasteful to her, and that I have her permission to

speak of it at some future time, when we have known each other longer."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"You are quite sure?"

"Certain."

"There is no mistake about her silence, for example, that might have led you into misinterpreting her wishes altogether?"

"Nothing of the kind is possible. Of course, I could not ask the girl for any promise, or anything of that sort. All I asked was whether she would allow me at some future time to ask her more definitely; and I am so well satisfied with the reply that I am convinced I shall marry her."

"And is this the fix you wish me to help you out of?" said Ingram, rather coldly.

"Now, Ingram," said the younger man, in penitential tones, "don't cut up rough about it. You know what I mean. Perhaps I have been hasty and inconsiderate about it; but of one thing you may be sure, that Sheila will never have to complain of me if she marries me. You say I don't know her yet?—but there will be plenty of time before we are married. I don't propose to carry her off to-morrow morning. Now, Ingram, you know what I mean about helping me in the fix—helping me with her father, you know, and with herself, for the matter of that. You can do anything with her, she has such a belief in you. You should hear how she talks of you—you never heard anything like it."

It was an innocent bit of flattery; and Ingram smiled good-naturedly at the boy's ingenuousness.

After all, was he not more loveable and more sincere in this little bit of simple craft, used in the piteousness of his appeal, than when he was giving himself the airs of a man about town, and talking of women in a fashion which, to do him justice, expressed nothing of his real sentiments?

Ingram walked on, and said, in his slow and deliberate way—

"You know I opposed this project of yours from the first. I don't think you have acted fairly by Sheila, or her father, or myself, who brought you here. But if Sheila has been drawn into it, why, then, the whole affair is altered, and we've got to make the best of a bad business."

"I was sure you would say that," exclaimed the younger man, with a brighter light appearing on his face. "You may call me all the hard names you like; I deserve them all, and more. But then, as you say, since Sheila is in it, you'll do your best, won't you?"

Frank Lavender could not make out why the taciturn and sallow-faced man walking beside him seemed to be greatly amused by this speech; but he was in no humour to take offence. He knew that, once Ingram had promised him his help, he would not lack all the advocacy, the advice, and even the money—should that become necessary—that a warm-hearted and disinterested friend could offer. Many and many a time Ingram had helped him; and now he was to come to his assistance in the most serious crisis of his life. Ingram would remove Sheila's doubts. Ingram would persuade old Mackenzie that girls had to get married some time or other, and that Sheila ought to

live in London. Ingram would be commissioned to break the news to Mrs. Lavender—but here, when the young man thought of the interview with his aunt which he would have to encounter, a cold shiver passed through his frame. He would not think of it. He would enjoy the present hour. Difficulties only grew the bigger the more they were looked at; when they were left to themselves, they frequently disappeared. It was another proof of Ingram's kindliness that he had not even mentioned the old lady down in Kensington, who was likely to have something to say about this marriage.

"There are a great many difficulties in the way," said Ingram, thoughtfully.

"Yes," said Lavender, with much eagerness; "but then, look. You may be sure that if we get over these, Sheila will know well who managed it, and she will not be ungrateful to you, I think. If we ever should be married, I am certain she will always look on you as her greatest friend."

"It is a big bribe," said the elder man, perhaps a trifle sadly; and Lavender looked at him with some vague return of a suspicion that some time or other Ingram must himself have been in love with Sheila.

They returned to the inn where they found Mackenzie busy with a heap of letters and newspapers that had been sent across to him from Stornoway. The whole of the breakfast table was littered with wrappers and big blue envelopes: where was Sheila, who usually waited on her father at such times to keep his affairs in order?

Sheila was outside; and Lavender saw her through the open window. Was she not waiting for him, that

she should pace up and down by herself, with her face turned away from the house? He immediately went out, and went over to her, and she turned to him as he approached. He fancied she looked a trifle pale, and far less bright and joyous than the ordinary Sheila.

"Mr. Lavender," she said, walking away from the house, "I wish very much to speak to you for a moment. Last night—it was all a misfortune that I did not understand—and I wish you to forget that a word was ever spoken about that."

Her head was bent down, and her speech was low and broken; what she failed to explain in words, her manner explained for her. But her companion said to her, with alarm and surprise in his tone—

"Why, Sheila! You cannot be so cruel. Surely you need not fear any embarrassment through so slight a promise. It pledges you to nothing—it leaves you quite free—and some day, if I come and ask you then a question I have not asked you yet—that will be time enough to give me an answer."

"Oh, no, no!" said the girl, obviously in great distress. "I cannot do that. It is unjust to you to let you think of it and hope about it. It was last night everything was strange to me—I did not understand then—but I have thought about it all the night through, and now I know."

"Sheila!" called her father from the inside of the inn; and she turned to go.

"But you do not ask that, do you?" he said. "You are only frightened a little bit just now; but that will go away. There is nothing to be frightened about. You have been thinking over it, and imagining impossible

things—you have been thinking of leaving Borva altogether——"

"Oh, that I can never do!" she said, with a pathetic earnestness.

"But why think of such a thing?" he said. "You need not look at all the possible troubles of life when you take such a simple step as this. Sheila, don't be hasty in any such resolve; you may be sure all the gloomy things you have been thinking of will disappear when we get close to them. And this is such a simple thing. I don't ask you to say you will be my wife—I have no right to ask you yet; but I have only asked permission of you to let me think of it, and even Mr. Ingram sees no great harm in that——"

"Does *he* know?" she said, with a start of surprise and fear.

"Yes," said Lavender, wishing he had bitten his tongue in two before he had uttered the word. "You know we have no secrets from each other: and to whom could I go for advice but to your oldest friend?"

"And what did he say?" she asked, with a strange look in her eyes.

"Well, he sees a great many difficulties; but he thinks they will easily be got over."

"Then," she said, with her eyes again cast down, and a certain sadness in her tone, "I must explain to him too, and tell him I had no understanding of what I said last night."

"Sheila, you won't do that!" urged the young man. "It means nothing—it pledges you to nothing——"

"Sheila! Sheila!" cried her father, cheerily, from the window; "come in and let us hef our breakfast."

"Yes, papa," said the girl; and she went into the house, followed by her companion.

But how could she find an opportunity of making this explanation? Shortly after breakfast, the waggonette was at the door of the little Barvas inn, and Sheila came out of the house, and took her place in it, with an unusual quietness of manner and hopelessness of look. Ingram, sitting opposite to her, and knowing nothing of what had taken place, fancied that this was but an expression of girlish timidity; and that it was his business to interest her and amuse her, until she should forget the strangeness and newness of her position. Nay, as he had resolved to make the best of matters as they stood, and as he believed that Sheila had half confessed to a special liking for his friend from the South, what more fitting thing could he do than endeavour to place Lavender in the most favourable light in her eyes? He began to talk of all the brilliant and successful things the young man had done, as fully as he could before himself. He contrived to introduce pretty anecdotes of Lavender's generosity; and there were plenty of these, for the young fellow had never a thought of consequences if he was touched by a tale of distress and if he could help the sufferer either with his own or anyone else's money. Ingram talked of all their excursions together, in Devonshire, in Brittany, and elsewhere, to impress on Sheila how well he knew his friend, and how long their intimacy had lasted. At first the girl was singularly reserved and silent; but somehow, as pleasant recollections were multiplied, and as Lavender seemed to have been always the associate and companion of this old friend of hers, some brighter expression came into her face

and she grew more interested. Lavender, not knowing whether or not to take her decision of that morning as final, and not wholly perceiving the aim of this kindly chat on the part of his friend, began to see at least that Sheila was pleased to hear the two men help out each other's stories about their pedestrian excursions, and that she at last grew bold enough to look up and meet his eyes in a timid fashion when she asked him a question.

So they drove along by the side of the sea, the level and well-made road leading them through miles and miles of rough moorland, with here and there a few huts or a sheep-fold to break the monotony of the undulating sky-line. Here and there, too, there were great cuttings of the peat-moss, with a thin line of water in the foot of the deep black trenches. Sometimes, again, they would escape altogether from any traces of human habitation; and Duncan would grow excited in pointing out to Miss Sheila the young grouse that had run off the road into the heather, where they stood and eyed the passing carriage with anything but a frightened air. And while Mackenzie hummed something resembling, but very vaguely resembling, "Love in thine eyes for ever plays," and while Ingram, in his quiet, desultory, and often sardonic fashion, amused the young girl with stories of her lover's bravery, and kindness, and dare-devil escapades, the merry trot of the horses beat time to the bells on their necks, the fresh west wind blew a cloud of white dust away over the moorland behind them, there was a blue sky shining all around them, and the blue Atlantic basking in the light.

They stopped for a few minutes at both the ham-

lets of Suainabost and Tabost to allow Sheila to pay a hurried visit to one or two of the huts, while Mackenzie, laying hold of some of the fishermen he knew, got them to show Lavender the curing-houses, in which the young gentleman professed himself profoundly interested. They also visited the school-house; and Lavender found himself beginning to look upon a two-storied building with windows as something imposing, and a decided triumph of human skill and enterprise. But what was the school-house of Tabost to the grand building at the Butt? They had driven away from the high road by a path leading through long and sweet-smelling pastures of Dutch clover. They had got up from these sandy swathes to a table-land of rock; and here and there they caught glimpses of fearful precipices leading sheer down to the boiling and dashing sea. The curious contortions of the rocks—the sharp needles of them springing in isolated pillars from out of the water—the roar of the eddying currents that swept through the chasms and dashed against the iron-bound shore—the wild sea-birds that flew about and screamed over the rushing waves and the surge, naturally enough drew the attention of the strangers altogether away from the land; and it was with a start of surprise they found themselves before an immense mass of yellow stone-work—walls, house, and tower—that shone in the sunlight. And here were the lighthouse-keeper and his wife, delighted to see strange faces, and most hospitably inclined; insomuch that Lavender, who cared little for luncheon at any time, was constrained to take as much bread, and cheese, and butter, and whisky as would have made a ploughman's dinner. It was a strange sort of

meal this, away out at the end of the world, as it were. The snug little room might have been in the Marylebone-road; there were photographs about, a gay label on the whisky-bottle, and other signs of an advanced civilization; but outside nothing but the wild precipices of the coast—a surging sea that seemed almost to surround the place—the wild screaming of the sea-birds, and a single ship appearing like a speck on the northern horizon.

They had not noticed the wind much as they drove along; but now, when they went out on to the high table-land of rock, it seemed to be blowing half a gale across the sea. The sunlight sparkled on the glass of the lighthouse, and the great yellow shaft of stone stretched away upward into a perfect blue. As clear a blue lay far beneath them, when the sea came rushing in among the lofty crags and sharp pinnacles of rock, bursting into foam at their feet, and sending long jets of white spray up into the air. In front of the great wall of rock, the sea-birds wheeled and screamed; and on the points of some of the islands stood several scarts, motionless figures of jet black on the soft brown and green of the rock. And what was this island they looked down upon from over one of the bays? Surely a mighty reproduction by Nature herself of the Sphinx of the Egyptian plains. Could anything have been more striking, and unexpected, and impressive than the sudden discovery of this great mass of rock resting in the wild sea, its hooded head turned away towards the north and hidden from the spectator on land, its gigantic bulk surrounded by a foam of breakers! Lavender, with his teeth set hard against the wind, must needs take down the outlines of this

strange scene upon paper; while Sheila crouched into her father's side for shelter, and Ingram was chiefly engaged in holding on to his cap.

"It blows here a bit," said Lavender, amid the roar of the waves. "I suppose in the winter time the sea will sometimes break across this place?"

"Ay, and over the top of the lighthouse, too," said Mackenzie, with a laugh, as though he was rather proud of the way his native seas behaved.

"Sheila," said Ingram, "I never saw *you* take refuge from the wind before."

"It is because we will be standing still," said the girl, with a smile which was scarcely visible because she had half hidden her face in her father's great grey beard. "But when Mr. Lavender is finished, we will go down to the great hole in the rocks that you will have seen before, and perhaps he will make a picture of that too."

"You don't mean to say you would go down there, Sheila," said Ingram, "and in this wind?"

"I hef been down many times before."

"Indeed, you will do nothing of the kind, Sheila," said her father; "you will go back to the lighthouse, if you like—yes, you may do that; and I will go down the rocks with Mr. Lavender; but it iss not for a young lady to go about among the rocks, like a fisherman's lad that wants the bird's eggs, or such nonsense."

It was quite evident that Mackenzie had very little fear of his daughter not being able to accomplish the descent of the rocks safely enough; it was simply a matter of dignity; and so Sheila was at length persuaded to go across the plain to a sheltered place to wait

there until the others should clamber down to the great and naturally-formed tunnel through the rocks that the artist was to sketch.

Lavender was ill at ease. He followed his guide mechanically as they made their way, in zigzag fashion, down the precipitous slopes and over slippery plateaus; and when at last he came in sight of the mighty arch, the long cavern, and the glimmer of sea and shore that could be seen through it, he began to put down the outlines of the picture as rapidly as possible, but with little interest in the matter. Ingram was sitting on the bare rocks beside him; Mackenzie was some distance off: should he tell his friend of what Sheila had said in the morning? Strict honesty, perhaps, demanded as much; but the temptation to say nothing was great. For it was evident that Ingram was now well inclined to the project, and would do his best to help it on; whereas, if once he knew that Sheila had resolved against it, he too might take some sudden step—such as insisting on their immediate return to the mainland—which would settle the matter for ever. Sheila had said she would herself make the necessary explanation to Ingram, but she had not done so; perhaps she might lack the courage or an opportunity to do so; and in the meantime was not the interval altogether favourable to his chances? Doubtless she was a little bit frightened at first. She would soon get less timid; and would relent, and revoke her decision of the morning. He would not, at present at any rate, say anything to Ingram.

But when they had got up again to the summit of the rocks, an incident occurred that considerably startled him out of these vague and anxious specula-

tions. He walked straight over to the sheltered spot in which Sheila was waiting. The rushing of the wind doubtless drowned the sound of his footsteps, so that he came on her unawares; and on seeing him she rose suddenly from the rock on which she had been sitting, with some effort to hide her face away from him. But he had caught a glimpse of something in her eyes that filled him with remorse.

"Sheila," he said, going forward to her, "what is the matter? What are you unhappy about?"

She could not answer; she held her face turned from him, and cast down; and then, seeing her father and Ingram in the distance, she set out to follow them to the lighthouse, Lavender walking by her side, and wondering how he could deal with the distress that was only too clearly written on her face.

"I know it is I who have grieved you," he said, in a low voice, "and I am very sorry. But if you will tell me what I can do to remove this unhappiness, I will do it now. Shall I consider our talking together of last night as if it had not taken place at all?"

"Yes," she said, in as low a voice, but clear, and sad, and determined in its tone.

"And I shall speak no more to you about this affair until I go away altogether?"

And again she signified her assent, gravely and firmly.

"And then," he said, "you will soon forget all about it; for, of course, I shall never come back to Lewis again."

"Never?"

The word had escaped her unwillingly, and it was

accompanied by a quick upturning of the face and a frightened look in the beautiful eyes.

"Do you wish me come back?" he said.

"I should not wish you to go away from the Lewis, through any fault of mine, and say that we should never see you again," said the girl, in measured tones, as if she were nerving herself to make the admission, and yet fearful of saying too much.

By this time Mackenzie and Ingram had gone round the big wall of the lighthouse; there were no human beings on this lonely bit of heath but themselves. Lavender stopped her, and took her hand, and said—

"Don't you see, Sheila, how I must never come back to Lewis, if all this is to be forgotten? And all I want you to say is that I may come some day to see if you can make up your mind to be my wife. I don't ask that yet—it is out of the question, seeing how short a time you have known anything about me—and I cannot expect you to trust me as I can trust you. It is a very little thing I ask—only to give me a chance at some future time, and then, if you don't care for me sufficiently to marry me, or if anything stands in the way, all you need do is to send me a single word, and that will suffice. This is no terrible thing that I beg from you, Sheila. You needn't be afraid of it."

But she was afraid; there was nothing but fear, and doubt, and grief in her eyes, as she gazed into the unknown world laid open before her.

"Can't you ask some one to tell you that it is nothing dreadful—Mr. Ingram, for example?"

"I could not."

"Your papa, then," he said, driven to this desperate resource by his anxiety to save her from pain.

"Not yet—not just yet," she said, almost wildly, "for how could I explain to him? He would ask me what my wishes were: what could I say? I do not know. I cannot tell myself; and—and—I have no mother to ask;" and here all the strain of self-control gave way, and the girl burst into tears.

"Sheila, dear Sheila," he said, "why won't you trust your own heart, and let that be your guide? Won't you say this one word—*yes*—and tell me that I am to come back to Lewis some day, and ask to see you, and get a message from one look of your eyes? Sheila, may I not come back?"

If there was a reply, it was so low that he scarcely heard it; but somehow—whether from the small hand that lay in his, or from the eyes that sent one brief message of trust and hope through their tears—his question was answered; and from that moment he felt no more misgivings, but let his love for Sheila spread out and blossom in whatever light of fancy and imagination he could bring to bear on it, careless of any future.

How the young fellow laughed and joked, as the party drove away again from the Butt, down the long coast-road to Barvas! He was tenderly respectful, and a little moderate in tone, when he addressed Sheila; but with the others he gave way to a wild exuberance of spirits, that delighted Mackenzie beyond measure. He told stories of the odd old gentlemen of his club, of their opinions, their ways, their dress. He sung the song of the "Arethusa," and the wilds of Lewis echoed

with a chorus which was not just as harmonious as it might have been. He sung the "Jug of Punch," and Mackenzie said that was "a teffle of a good song." He gave imitations of some of Ingram's companions at the Board of Trade; and showed Sheila what the inside of a Government Office was like. He paid Mackenzie the compliment of asking him for a drop of something out of his flask; and in return he insisted on the King smoking a cigar—which, in point of age, and sweetness, and fragrance, was really the sort of cigar you would naturally give to the man whose daughter you wanted to marry.

Ingram understood all this; and was pleased to see the happy look that Sheila wore. He talked to her with even a greater assumption than usual of fatherly fondness; and if she was a little shy, was it not because she was conscious of so great a secret? He was even unusually complaisant to Lavender, and lost no opportunity of paying him indirect compliments that Sheila could overhear.

"You poor young things!" he seemed to be saying to himself, "you've got all your troubles before you; but in the meantime you may make yourselves as happy as you can!"

Was the weather at last about to break? As the afternoon wore on, the heavens became overcast, for the wind had gone back from the course of the sun, and had brought up great masses of cloud from the rainy south-west.

"Are we going to have a storm?" said Lavender, looking along the southern sky, where the Barvas hills were momentarily growing blacker under the gathering darkness overhead.

"A storm?" said Mackenzie, whose notions on what constituted a storm were probably different from those of his guest. "No—there will be no storm. But it is no bad thing if we get back to Barvas very soon."

Duncan sent the horses on, and Ingram looked out Sheila's waterproof and the rugs. The southern sky certainly looked ominous. There was a strange intensity of colour in the dark landscape, from the deep purple of the Barvas hills, coming forward to the deep green of the pasture-land around them, and the rich reds and browns of the heath and the peat-cuttings. At one point of the clouded and hurrying sky, however, there was a soft and vaporous line of yellow in the grey; and, under that, miles away in the west, a great dash of silver light struck upon the sea, and glowed there so that the eye could scarcely bear it. Was it the damp that brought the perfumes of the moorland so distinctly towards them—the bog-myrtle, the water-mint, and wild thyme? There were no birds to be heard. The crimson masses of heather on the grey rocks seemed to have grown richer and deeper in colour; and the Barvas hills had become large and weird in the gloom.

"Are you afraid of thunder?" said Lavender to Sheila.

"No," said the girl, looking frankly towards him with her glad eyes, as though he had pleased her by asking that not very striking question. And then she looked round at the sea and the sky in the south, and said, quietly, "But there will be no thunder; it is too much wind."

Ingram, with a smile which he could scarcely conceal, hereupon remarked—

"You're sorry, Lavender, I know. Wouldn't you like to shelter somebody in danger, or attempt a rescue, or do something heroic?"

"And Mr. Lavender would do that, if there was any need," said the girl, bravely; "and then it would be nothing to laugh at."

"Sheila, you bad girl, how dare you talk like that to me!" said Ingram; and he put his arm within hers, and said he would tell her a story.

But this race to escape the storm was needless; for they were just getting within sight of Barvas, when a surprising change came over the dark and thunderous afternoon. The hurrying masses of cloud in the west parted for a little space, and there was a sudden and fitful glimmer of a stormy blue sky. Then a strange, soft, yellow, and vaporous light shot across to the Barvas hills, and touched up palely the great slopes, rendering them distant, ethereal, and cloud-like. Then a shaft or two of wild light flashed down upon the landscape beside them. The cattle shone red in the brilliant green pastures. The grey rocks glowed in their setting of moss. The stream going by Barvas Inn was a streak of gold in its sandy bed. And then the sky above them broke into great billows of cloud—tempestuous and rounded masses of golden vapour that burned with the wild glare of the sunset. The clear spaces in the sky widened, and from time to time the wind sent ragged bits of yellow cloud across the shining blue. All the world seemed to be on fire; and the very smoke of it—the majestic masses of vapour that rolled by overhead—burned with a bewildering glare. Then, as the wind still blew hard, and kept veering round again to the north-west, the

fiercely-lit clouds were driven over one by one, leaving a pale and serene sky to look down on the sinking sun and the sea. The Atlantic caught the yellow glow on its tumbling waves, and a deeper colour stole across the slopes and peaks of the Barvas hills. Whither had gone the storm? There were still some banks of clouds away up in the north-east; and in the clear green of the evening sky, they had their distant greys and purples faintly tinged with rose.

"And so you are anxious, and frightened, and a little pleased," said Ingram to Sheila that evening, after he had frankly told her what he knew, and invited her further confidence. "That is all I can gather from you; but it is enough. Now you can leave the rest to me."

"To you?" said the girl, with a blush of pleasure and surprise.

"Yes. I like new experiences. I am going to become an intermeddler now. I am going to arrange this affair, and become the negotiator between all the parties; and then, when I have secured the happiness of the whole of you, you will all set upon me and beat me with sticks, and thrust me out of your houses."

"I do not think," said Sheila, looking down, "that you have much fear of that, Mr. Ingram."

"Is the world going to alter because of me?"

"I would rather not have you try to do anything that is likely to get you into unhappiness," she said.

"Oh, but that is absurd. You timid young folks can't act for yourselves. You want agents and instruments that have got hardened by use. Fancy the con-

dition of our ancestors, you know, before they had the sense to invent steel claws to tear their food in pieces —what could they do with their fingers? I am going to be your knife and fork, Sheila; and you'll see what I shall carve out for you. All you've got to do is to keep your spirits up, and believe that nothing dreadful is going to take place merely because some day you will be asked to marry. You let things take their ordinary course. Keep your spirits up—don't neglect your music, or your dinner, or your poor people down in Borvabost—and you'll see it will all come right enough. In a year or two, or less than that, you will marry contentedly and happily, and your papa will drink a good glass of whisky at the wedding, and make jokes about it, and everything will be as right as the mail. That's my advice,—see you attend to it."

"You are very kind to me," said the girl, in a low voice.

"But if you begin to cry, Sheila, then I throw up my duties—do you hear? Now look—there goes Mr. Lavender down to the boat with a bundle of rugs; and I suppose you mean me to imperil my precious life by sailing about these rocky channels in the moonlight? Come along down to the shore; and mind you please your papa by singing 'Love in thine eyes,' with Mr. Lavender. And if you would add to that 'The Minute Gun at Sea,'—why, you know, I may as well have my little rewards for intermeddling now, as I shall have to suffer afterwards."

"Not through me," said Sheila, in rather an uncertain voice: and then they went down to the *Maighdeanmhara.*

CHAPTER VIII.

"O terque quaterque Beate!"

CONSIDER what a task this unhappy man Ingram had voluntarily undertaken! Here were two young people presumably in love. One of them was laid under suspicion by several previous love-affairs, though none of these, doubtless, had been so serious as the present. The other scarcely knew her own mind—or perhaps was afraid to question herself too closely lest all the conflict between duty and inclination, with its fears and anxieties and troubles, should be too suddenly revealed. Moreover, this girl was the only daughter of a solitary and irascible old gentleman living in a remote island; and Ingram had not only undertaken that the love-affairs of the young folks should come all right—thus assuming a responsibility which might have appalled the bravest—but was also expected to inform the King of Borva that his daughter was about to be taken from him.

For how was Sheila to go to her father and explain to him what she could not explain to herself? She had never dreamed of marriage. She had never thought of having to leave Borva and her father's house. But she had some vague feeling that in the future lay many terrible possibilities that she did not as yet dare to look at—until, at least, she was more satisfied as to the present. And how could she go to her father with such a chaos of unformed wishes and fears to place before him? That such a duty should have devolved upon Ingram was certainly odd enough; but it was not her doing. His knowledge of the position of these young people was not derived from

her. Having got it, however, he had himself asked her to leave the whole affair in his hands, with that kindness and generosity which had more than once filled her heart with an unspeakable gratitude toward him.

"Well, you *are* a good fellow!" said Lavender to him, when he heard of this decision.

"Bah!" said the other, with a shrug of his shoulders, "I mean to amuse myself. I shall move you about like pieces on a chess-board, and have a pretty game with you. How to checkmate the king with a knight and a princess—in any number of moves you like—that is the problem; and my princess has a strong power over the king, where she is just now."

"It's an uncommonly awkward business, you know, Ingram," said Lavender, ruefully.

"Well, it is. Old Mackenzie is a tough old fellow to deal with; and you'll do no good by making a fight of it. Wait. Difficulties don't look so formidable when you take them one by one as they turn up. If you really love the girl, and mean to take your chance of getting her, and if she cares enough for you to sacrifice a good deal for your sake, there is nothing to fear."

"I can answer for myself, any way," said Lavender, in a tone of voice that Ingram rather liked: the young man did not always speak with the same quietness, thoughtfulness, and modesty.

And how naturally and easily it came about, after all! They were back again at Borva. They had driven round and about Lewis, and had finished up with Stornoway! and, now that they had got back to the island in Loch Roag, the quaint little drawing-

room had even to Lavender a homely and friendly look. The big stuffed fishes and the strange shells were old acquaintances; and he went to hunt up Sheila's music just as if he had known that dusky corner for years.

"Yes, yes!" called Mackenzie, "it iss the English songs we will try now."

He had a notion that he was himself rather a good hand at a part song—just as Sheila had innocently taught him to believe that he was a brilliant whist-player when he had mastered the art of returning his partner's lead—but fortunately at this moment he was engaged with a long pipe and a big tumbler of hot whisky and water. Ingram was similarly employed, lying back in a cane-bottomed easy chair, and placidly watching the smoke ascending to the roof. Sometimes he cast an eye to the young folks at the other end of the room. They formed a pretty sight, he thought. Lavender was a good-looking fellow enough; and there was something pleasing in the quiet and assiduous fashion in which he waited upon Sheila, and in the almost timid way in which he spoke to her. Sheila herself sat at the piano, clad all in slate-grey silk, with a narrow band of scarlet velvet round her neck; and it was only by a chance turning of the head that Ingram caught the tender and handsome profile, broken only by the outward sweep of the long eye-lashes.

"Love in thine eyes for ever plays,"

Sheila sang, with her father keeping time by patting his forefinger on the table.

"He in thy snowy bosom strays,"

sang Lavender; and then the two voices joined together—

"He makes thy rosy lips his care,
And walks the mazes of thy hair."

Or were there not three voices? Surely, from the back part of the room, the musicians could hear a wandering bass come in from time to time, especially at such portions as "Ah, he never, ah, he never, never touched thy heart!" which old Mackenzie considered very touching. But there was something quaint, and friendly, and pleasant in the pathos of those English songs which made them far more acceptable to him than Sheila's wild and melancholy legends of the sea. He sang, "Ah, he never, never touched thy heart!" with an outward expression of grief, but with much inward satisfaction. Was it the quaint phraseology of the old duets that awoke in him some faint ambition after histrionic effect? At all events, Sheila proceeded to another of his favourites—"All's Well"—and here, amid the brisk music, the old Highlandman had an excellent opportunity of striking in at random.

"The careful watch patrols the deck,
To guard the ship from foes or wreck—"

these two lines he had absolutely mastered, and always sang them, whatever might be the key he happened to light on, with great vigour. He soon went the length of improvising a part for himself in the closing passages; and laid down his pipe altogether as he sang—

"What cheer? Brother, quickly tell!
Above? Below! Good-night! All, all's well!"

From that point, however, Sheila and her companion wandered away into fields of melody whither the King

of Borva could not follow them; so he was content to resume his pipe and listen placidly to the pretty airs. He caught but bits and fragments of phrases and sentiments; but they evidently were comfortable, merry, good-natured songs for young folks to sing. There was a good deal of love-making, and rosy morns appearing, and merry zephyrs, and such odd things, which, sung briskly and gladly by two young and fresh voices, rather drew the hearts of contemplative listeners to the musicians.

"They sing very well whatever," said Mackenzie, with a critical air, to Ingram, when the young people were so busily engaged with their own affairs as apparently to forget the presence of the others. "Oh, yes, they sing very well whatever; and what should the young folks sing about but making love, and courting, and all that?"

"Natural enough," said Ingram, looking rather wistfully at the two at the other end of the room. "I suppose Sheila will have a sweetheart some day?"

"Oh, yes, Sheila will hef a sweetheart some day," said her father, good-humouredly. "Sheila is a good-looking girl; she will hef a sweetheart some day."

"She will marry too, I suppose," said Ingram, cautiously.

"Oh, yes, she will be marrying; Sheila will be marrying—what will be the life of a young girl if she does not marry?"

At this moment, as Ingram afterwards described it, a sort of "flash of inspiration" darted in upon him, and he resolved there and then to brave the wrath of

the old king, and place all the conspiracy before him, if only the music kept loud enough to prevent his being overheard.

"It will be hard on you to part with Sheila when she marries," said Ingram, scarcely daring to look up.

"Oh, ah, it will be that," said Mackenzie, cheerfully enough. "But it is everyone will hef to do that; and no great harm comes of it. Oh, no, it will not be much whatever; and Sheila she will be very glad in a little while after, and it will be enough for me to see that she is ferry contented and happy. The young folk must marry, you will see, and what is the use of marrying if it is not when they are young? But Sheila, she will think of none of these things. It was young Mr. MacIntyre of Sutherland—you hef seen him last year in Stornoway—he hass three thousand acres of a deer-forest in Sutherland—and he will be ferry glad to marry Miss Sheila. But I will say to him, 'It is not for me to say yes or no to you, Mr. MacIntyre; it is Sheila herself will tell you that.' But he wass afraid to speak to her: and Sheila herself will know nothing of why he came twice to Borva the last year."

"It is very good of you to leave Sheila quite unbiassed in her choice," said Ingram; "many fathers would have been sorely tempted by that deer-forest."

Old Mackenzie laughed a loud laugh of derision, that fortunately did not stop Lavender's execution of "I would that my love would silently."

"What the teffle," said Mackenzie, "hef I to want a deer-forest for my Sheila? Sheila is no fisherman's lass. She has plenty for herself, and she will marry

just the young man she wants to marry, and no other one—that is what she will do, by Kott!"

All this was most hopeful. If Mackenzie had himself been advocating Lavender's suit, could he have said more? But notwithstanding all these frank and generous promises—dealing with a future which the old Highlandman considered as indefinitely remote—Ingram was still afraid of the announcement he was about to make.

"Sheila is fortunately situated," he said, "in having a father who thinks only of her happiness. But I suppose she has never yet shown a preference for anyone?"

"Not for anyone but yourself," said her father, with a laugh.

And Ingram laughed too, but in an embarrassed way, and his sallow face grew darker with a blush. Was there not something painful in the unintentional implication that of course Ingram could not be considered a possible lover of Sheila's, and that the girl herself was so well aware of it that she could openly testify to her regard for him?

"And it would be a good thing for Sheila," continued her father, more gravely, "if there wass any young man about the Lewis that she would tek a liking to; for it will be some day I can no more look after her, and it would be bad for her to be left alone all by herself in the island."

"And don't you think you see before you now some one who might take on him the charge of Sheila's future?" said Ingram, looking towards Lavender.

"The English gentleman?" said Mackenzie, with a smile. "No; that any way is not possible."

"I fancy it is more than possible," said Ingram, resolved to go straight at it. "I know for a fact that he would like to marry your daughter, and I think that Sheila, without knowing it herself almost, is well-inclined towards him."

The old man started up from his chair.

"Eh? what! my Sheila?"

"Yes, papa," said the girl, turning round at once.

She caught sight of a strange look on his face, and in an instant was by his side.

"Papa, what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, Sheila, nothing," he said impatiently. "I am a little tired of the music, that is all. But go on with the music. Go back to the piano, Sheila, and go on with the music; and Mr. Ingram and me, we will go outside for a little while."

Mackenzie walked out of the room, and said, aloud in the hall—

"Ay, are you coming, Mr. Ingram? It iss a fine night this night, and the wind is in a very good way for the weather."

And then, as he went out to the front, he hummed aloud, so that Sheila should hear,—

> "Who goes there? Stranger, quickly tell!
> A friend! The word? Good-night! All's well!
> All's well! Good-night! All's well!"

Ingram followed the old man outside, with a somewhat guilty conscience, suggesting odd things to him. Would it not be possible, now, to shut one's ears for the next half-hour? Angry words were only little perturbations in the air. If you shut your ears till they were all over, what harm could be done? All the big facts of life would remain the same. The sea, the

sky, the hills, the human beings around you, even your desire of sleep for the night, and your wholesome longing for breakfast in the morning, would all remain; and the angry words would have passed away. But perhaps it was a proper punishment that he should now go out and bear all the wrath of this fierce old gentleman, whose daughter he had conspired to carry off. Mackenzie was walking up and down the path outside, in the cool and silent night. There was not much moon now, but a clear and lambent twilight showed all the familiar features of Loch Roag and the southern hills; and down there in the bay you could vaguely make out the *Maighdean-mhara* rocking in the tiny waves that washed in on the white shore. Ingram had never looked on this pretty picture with a less feeling of delight.

"Well, you see, Mr. Mackenzie," he was beginning, "you must make this excuse for him——"

But Mackenzie put aside Lavender at once. It was all about Sheila that he wanted to know. There was no anger in his words—only a great anxiety, and sometimes an extraordinary and pathetic effort to take a philosophical view of the situation. What had Sheila said? Was Sheila deeply interested in the young man? Would it please Sheila if he was to go indoors and give at once his free consent to her marrying this Mr. Lavender?

"Oh, you must not think," said Mackenzie, with a certain loftiness of air even amidst his great perturbation and anxiety, "you must not think I hef not foreseen all this. It wass some day or other Sheila will be sure to marry; and although I did not expect—no, I did not expect *that*—that she would marry a stranger

and an Englishman, if it will please her, that is enough. You cannot tell a young lass the one she should marry—it iss all a chance the one she likes, and if she does not marry him, it is better she will not marry at all. Oh, yes, I know that ferry well. And I hef known there wass a time coming when I would give away my Sheila to some young man; and there iss no use complaining of it. But you hef not told me much about this young man—or I hef forgotten—it is the same thing whatever. He has not much money, you said—he is waiting for some money, —well—this is what I will do. I *will give him all my money if he will come and live in the Lewis.*"

All the philosophy he had been mustering up fell away from that last sentence. It was like the cry of a drowning man who sees the last lifeboat set out for shore, leaving him to his fate. And Ingram had not a word to say in reply to that piteous entreaty.

"I do not ask him to stop in Borva—no, it iss a small place for one that hass lived in a town. But the Lewis, that is quite different; and there iss ferry good houses in Stornoway——"

"But surely, sir," said Ingram, "you need not consider all this just yet. I am sure neither of them has thought of any such thing——"

"No," said Mackenzie, recovering himself, "perhaps not. But we hef our duties to look at the future of young folks. And you will say that Mr. Lavender hass only expectations of money?"

"Well, the expectation is almost a certainty. His aunt, I have told you, is a very rich old lady, who has no other near relations; and she is exceedingly fond of him, and would do anything for him. I am sure

the allowance he has now is greatly in excess of what she spends on herself."

"But they might quarrel, you know—they might quarrel. You hef always to look to the future—they might quarrel, and what will he do then?"

"Why, you don't suppose he couldn't support himself, if the worst were to come to the worst. He is an amazingly clever fellow——"

"Ay, that is very good," said Mackenzie, in a cautious sort of way; "but has he ever made any money?"

"Oh, I fancy not—nothing to speak of. He has sold some pictures; but I think he has given more away."

"Then it iss not easy, tek my word for it, Mr. Ingram, to begin a new trade if you are twenty-five years of age; and the people who will tek your pictures for nothing, will they pay for them if you wanted the money?"

It was obviously Mr. Mackenzie's eager wish to prove to himself that, somehow or other, Lavender might come to have no money, and be made dependent on his father-in-law. So far, indeed, from sharing the sentiments ordinarily attributed to that important relative, he would have welcomed with a heartfelt joy the information that the man who, as he expected, was about to marry his daughter, was absolutely penniless. Not even all the attractions of that deer-forest in Sutherlandshire—particularly fascinating as they must have been to a man of his education and surroundings—had been able to lead the old King of Borva even into hinting to his daughter that the owner of that property would like to marry her. Sheila was

to choose for herself. She was not like a fisherman's lass, bound to consider ways and means. And now that she had chosen, or, at least, indicated the possibility of her doing so, her father's chief desire was that his future son-in-law should come and take and enjoy his money, so only that Sheila might not be carried away from him for ever.

"Well, I will see about it," said Mackenzie, with an affectation of cheerful and practical shrewdness. "Oh, yes, I will see about it, when Sheila has made up her mind. He is a very good young man, whatever——"

"He is the best-hearted fellow I know," said Ingram, warmly. "I don't think Sheila has much to fear if she marries him. If you had known him as long as I have, you would know how considerate he is to everybody about him, how generous he is, how good-natured, and cheerful, and so forth—in short, he is a thorough good fellow, that's what I have to say about him."

"It iss well for him he will hef such a champion," said Mackenzie, with a smile; "there iss not many Sheila will pay attention to as she does to you."

They went indoors again—Ingram scarcely knowing how he had got so easily through the ordeal, but very glad it was over. Sheila was still at the piano, and, on their entering, she said—

"Papa, here is a song you must learn to sing with me."

"And what iss it, Sheila?" he said, going over to her.

"'Time has not thinned my flowing hair.'"

He put his hand on her head, and said—

"I hope it will be a long time before he will thin your hair, Sheila."

The girl looked up, surprised. Scotch folks are, as a rule, somewhat reticent in their display of affection; and it was not often that her father talked to her in that way. What was there in his face that made her glance instinctively towards Ingram? Somehow or other her hand sought her father's hand, and she rose and went away from the piano, with her head bent down and tears beginning to tell in her eyes.

"Yes, that is a capital song," said Ingram, loudly. "Sing 'The Arethusa,' Lavender. '*Said the saucy Arethusa.*'"

Lavender, knowing what had taken place, and not daring to follow with his eyes Sheila and her father, who had gone to the other end of the room, sang the song. Never was a gallant and devil-may-care sea-song sung so hopelessly without spirit. But the piano made a noise; and the verses took up time. When he had finished, he almost feared to turn round; and yet there was nothing dreadful in the picture that presented itself. Sheila was sitting on her father's knee, with her head buried in his bosom, while he was patting her head, and talking in a low voice to her. The King of Borva did not look particularly fierce.

"Yes, it iss a teffle of a good song," he said, suddenly. "Now get up, Sheila, and go and tell Mairi we will have a bit of bread and cheese before going to bed. And there will be a little hot water wanted in the other room, for this room it iss too full of the smoke."

Sheila, as she went out of the room, had her head cast down, and perhaps an extra tinge of colour in the

young and pretty face. But surely, Lavender thought to himself, as he watched her anxiously, she did not look grieved. As for her father, what should he do now? Turn suddenly round, and beg Mackenzie's pardon, and throw himself on his generosity? When he did, with much inward trembling, venture to approach the old man, he found no such explanation possible. The King of Borva was in one of his grandest moods—dignified, courteous, cautious, and yet inclined to treat everybody and everything with a sort of lofty good humour. He spoke to Lavender in the most friendly way; but it was about the singular and startling fact that modern research had proved many of the Roman legends to be utterly untrustworthy. Mr. Mackenzie observed that the man was wanting in proper courage who feared to accept the results of such inquiries. It was better that we should know the truth, and then the kings who had really made Rome great might emerge from the fog of tradition in their proper shape. There was something quite sympathetic in the way he talked of those ill-treated sovereigns, whom the vulgar mind had clothed in mist.

Lavender was sorely beset by the rival claims of Rome and Borva upon his attention. He was inwardly inclined to curse Numa Pompilius—which would have been ineffectual—when he found that personage interfering with a wild effort to discover why Mackenzie should treat him in this way. And then it occurred to him that, as he had never said a word to Mackenzie about this affair, it was too much to expect that Sheila's father should himself open the subject. On the contrary, Mackenzie was bent on extending a grave

courtesy to his guest, so that the latter should not feel ill at ease until it suited himself to make any explanations he might choose. It was not Mackenzie's business to ask this young man if he wanted to marry Sheila. No. The king's daughter, if she were to be won at all, was to be won by a suitor; and it was not for her father to be in a hurry about it. So Lavender got back into the region of early Roman history, and tried to recall what he had learned in Livy, and quite coincided with everything that Niebuhr had said or proved, and with everything that Mackenzie thought Niebuhr had said or proved. He was only too glad, indeed, to find himself talking to Sheila's father in this friendly fashion.

Then Sheila came in and told them that supper was laid in the adjoining room. At that modest meal, a great good-humour prevailed. Sometimes, it is true, it occurred to Ingram that Sheila cast an anxious glance at her father, as if she were trying to discover whether he was really satisfied, or whether he was not merely pretending satisfaction to please her; but for the rest the party was a most friendly and merry one. Lavender, naturally enough, was in the highest of spirits; and nothing could exceed the light-hearted endeavours he made to amuse, and interest, and cheer his companions. Sheila, indeed, sat up later than usual, even although pipes were lit again, and the slate-grey silk likely to bear witness to the fact in the morning. How comfortable and homely was this sort of life in the remote stone building overlooking the northern sea! He began to think that he could live always in Borva, if only Sheila were with him as his companion.

Was it an actual fact, then, he asked himself next morning, that he stood confessed to the small world of Borva as Sheila's accepted lover? Not a word on the subject had passed between Mackenzie and himself; yet he found himself assuming the position of a younger relative, and rather expecting advice from the old Highlandman. He began to take a great interest, too, in the local administration of the island; he examined the window-fastenings of Mackenzie's house and saw that they would be useful in the winter; and expressed to Sheila's father his confidential opinion that the girl should not be allowed to go out in the *Maighdean-mhara* without Duncan.

"She will know as much about boats as Duncan himself," said her father, with a confident smile. "But Sheila will not go out when the rough weather begins."

"Of course you keep her indoors then?" said the younger man, already assuming some little charge over Sheila's comfort.

The father laughed aloud at this simplicity on the part of the Englishman.

"If we wass to keep indoors in the bad weather, it would be all the winter we would be indoors! There iss no day at all Sheila will not be out some time or other; and she is never so well as in the hard weather, when she will be out always in the snow, and the frost, and hef plenty of exercise and amusement."

"She is not often ailing, I suppose?" said Lavender.

"She is as strong as a young pony, that is what Sheila is," said her father, proudly. "And there is no one in the island will run so fast, or walk as long without tiring, or carry things from the shore as she will, not one."

But here he suddenly checked himself.

"That is," he said, with some little expression of annoyance, "I wass saying Sheila could do that if it wass any use; but she will not do such things, like a fisherman's lass that hass to help in the work."

"Oh, of course not," said Lavender, hastily. "But still, you know, it is pleasant to know she is so strong and well."

And at this moment Sheila herself appeared, accompanied by her great deer-hound, and testifying by the bright colour in her face to the assurances of her health her father had been giving. She had just come up and over the hill from Borvabost, while as yet breakfast had not been served. Somehow or other Lavender fancied she never looked so bright, and fearless, and handsome as in the early morning, with the fresh sea-air tingling the colour in her cheeks, and the sunlight shining in the clear eyes or touching from time to time a glimpse of her perfect teeth. But this morning she did not seem quite so frankly merry as usual. She patted the deer-hound's head, and rather kept her eyes away from her father and his companion. And then she took Bras away to give him his breakfast just as Ingram appeared to bid her good morning, and ask her what she meant by being about so early.

How anxiously Lavender now began to calculate on the remaining days of their stay in Borva! They seemed so few. He got up at preposterously early hours to make each day as long as possible; but it slipped away with a fatal speed, and already he began to think of Stornoway, and the *Clansman*, and his bidding good-bye to Sheila. He had said no more to

her of any pledge as regarded the future. He was content to see that she was pleased to be with him; and happy indeed were their rambles about the island, their excursions in Sheila's boat, their visits to the White Water in search of salmon. Nor had he yet spoken to Sheila's father. He knew that Mackenzie knew; and both seemed to take it for granted that no good could come of a formal explanation until Sheila herself should make her wishes known. That, indeed, was the only aspect of the case that apparently presented itself to the old King of Borva. He forgot altogether those precautions and investigations which are supposed to occupy the mind of a future father-in-law; and only sought to see how Sheila was affected towards the young man who was soon about to leave the island. When he saw her pleased to be walking with Lavender, and talking with him of an evening, he was pleased; and would rather have a cold dinner than break in upon them to hurry them home. When he saw her disappointed because Lavender had been unfortunate in his salmon-fishing, he was ready to swear at Duncan for not having had the fish in a better temper. And the most of his conversation with Ingram consisted of an endeavour to convince himself that, after all, what had happened was for the best, and that Sheila seemed to be happy.

But somehow or other, when the time for their departure was drawing near, Mackenzie showed a strange desire that his guests should spend the last two days in Stornoway. When Lavender first heard this proposal, he glanced towards Sheila, and his face showed clearly his disappointment.

"But Sheila will go with us, too," said her father,

replying to that unuttered protest in the most innocent fashion; and then Lavender's face brightened again, and he said that nothing would give him greater pleasure than to spend two days in Stornoway.

"And you must not think," said Mackenzie, anxiously, "that it is one day or two days, or a great many days, will show you all the fine things about Stornoway. And if you were to live in Stornoway, you would find very good acquaintances and friends there; and in the autumn, when the shooting begins, there are many English who will come up, and there will be ferry great doings at the castle. And there is some gentlemen now at Grimersta whom you hef not seen, and they are ferry fine gentlemen; and at Garra-na-hina there iss two more gentlemen for the salmon-fishing. Oh, there iss a great many fine people in the Lewis, and it iss not all as lonely as Borva."

"If it is half as pleasant a place to live in as Borva, it will do," said Lavender, with a flush of enthusiasm in his face, as he looked towards Sheila, and saw her pleased and downcast eyes.

"But it iss not to be compared," said Mackenzie, eagerly. "Borva—that is nothing at all; but the Lewis—it is a ferry different thing to live in the Lewis, and many English gentlemen hef told me they would like to live always in the Lewis."

"I think I should, too," said Lavender, lightly and carelessly, little thinking what importance the old man immediately and gladly put upon the admission.

From that moment Lavender, always unconscious of what had happened, had nothing to fear in the way of opposition from Sheila's father. If he had there and then boldly asked Mackenzie for his daughter, the

old man would have given his consent freely, and bade Lavender go to Sheila herself.

And so they set sail, one pleasant forenoon, from Borvabost; and the light wind that ruffled the blue of Loch Roag gently filled the mainsail of the *Maighdean-mhara* as she lightly ran down the tortuous channel.

"I don't like to go away from Borva," said Lavender, in a low voice, to Sheila, "but I might have been leaving the island with greater regret, for, you know, I expect to be back soon."

"We shall always be glad to see you," said the girl; and, although he would rather have had her say "I" than "we," there was something in the tone of her voice that contented him.

At Garra-na-hina, Mackenzie pointed out with a great interest to Lavender a tall man who was going down through some meadows to the *Amhuinn Dhubh*, the Black River. He had a long rod over his shoulder; and behind him, at some distance, followed a shorter man, who carried a gaff and landing-net. Mackenzie anxiously explained to Lavender that the tall figure was that of an Englishman. Lavender accepted the statement. But would he not go down to the river and make his acquaintance? Lavender could not understand why he should be expected to take so great an interest in an ordinary English sportsman.

"Ferry well," said Mackenzie, a trifle disappointed, "but you would find several of the English in the Lewis if you wass living here."

These last two days in Stornoway were very pleasant. On their previous visit to the town, Mackenzie had given up much of his time to business affairs, and

was a good deal away from his guests; but now he devoted himself to making them particularly comfortable in the place and amusing them in every possible way. He introduced Lavender, in especial, to all his friends there, and was most anxious to impress on the young man that life in Stornoway was, on the whole, rather a brilliant affair. Then, was there a finer point from which you could start at will for Inverness, Oban, and such great centres of civilization? Very soon there might even be a telegraphic cable laid to the mainland. Was Mr. Lavender aware that frequently you could see the Sutherlandshire hills from this very town of Stornoway?

Here Sheila laughed; and Lavender, who kept watching her face always, to read all her fancies and sentiments and wishes in the shifting lights of it, immediately demanded an explanation.

"It is no good thing," said Sheila, "to see the Sutherland hills often; for when you see them, it means to rain."

But Lavender had not been taught to fear the rain of the Western Isles. The very weather seemed to have conspired with Mackenzie to charm the young man with the island. At this moment, for example, they were driving away from Stornoway along the side of the great bay that stretches northward until it finds its furthest promontory in Tiumpan Head. What magnificence of colour shone all around them in the hot sunlight! Where the ruffled blue sea came near the long sweep of yellow sand it grew to be a bright, transparent green. The splendid curve of the bay showed a gleaming line of white where the waves broke in masses of hissing foam; and beyond that

curve again long promontories of dark-red conglomerate ran out into the blue waters of the sea, with their summits shining with the bright sea-grass. Here, close at hand, were warm meadows with calves and lambs cropping the sweet-scented Dutch clover. A few huts, shaped like bee-hives, stood by the road-side, close by some deep brown peats. There was a cutting in the yellow sand of the bay for the pulling up of captured whales. Now and again you could see a solan dart down from the blue heavens into the darker blue of the sea, sending up a spurt of foam twenty feet high as he disappeared; and far out there, between the red precipices and the ruffled waters beneath, white sea-fowl flew from crag to crag or dropped down upon the sea to rise and fall with the waves.

At the small hamlet of Gress they got a large rowing-boat manned by sturdy fishermen, and set out to explore the great caves formed in the mighty wall of conglomerate that here fronts the sea. The wild-fowl flew about them, screaming and yelling at being disturbed. The long swell of the sea lifted the boat, passed from under it, and went on with majestic force to crash on the glowing red crags and send jets of foam flying up the face of them. They captured one of the sea-birds—a young thing about as big as a hen, with staring eyes, scant feathers, and a long beak with which it instinctively tried to bite its enemies—and the parents of it kept swooping down over the boat, uttering shrill cries, until their offspring was restored to the surface of the water. They went into the great loud-sounding caverns, getting a new impression of the extraordinary clearness of the sea-water by the depth at which the bottom was visible; and here their shouts

occasionally called up from some dim twilight recess —far in among the perilous rocks—the head of a young seal, which would instantly dive again and be seen no more. They watched the salmon splash in the shallower creeks where the sea had scooped out a tiny bay of ruddy sand; and then a slowly-rolling porpoise would show his black back above the water and silently disappear again. All this was pleasant enough on a pleasant morning, in fresh sea-air and sunlight, in holiday-time; and was there any reason, Mackenzie may fairly have thought, why this young man, if he did marry Sheila, should not come and live in a place where so much healthy amusement was to be found?

And in the evening, too, when they had climbed to the top of the hills on the south of Stornoway harbour, did not the little town look sufficiently picturesque, with its white houses, its shipping, its great castle and plantations lying in shadow under the green of the eastern sky? Then, away to the west, what a strange picture presented itself! Thick bands of grey cloud lay across the sky, and the sunlight from behind them sent down great rays of misty yellow on the endless miles of moor. But how was it that, as these shafts of sunlight struck on the far and successive ridges of the moorland, each long undulation seemed to become transparent; and all the island appeared to consist of great and golden-brown shells, heaped up behind each other, with the sunlight shining through?

"I have tried a good many new effects since I came up here," said Lavender, "but I shall not try *that*."

"Oh, it iss nothing—it iss nothing at all," said

Mackenzie, with a studied air of unconcern. "There iss much more beautiful things than that in the island, but you will hef need of a ferry long time before you will find it all out. That—that iss nothing at all."

"You will perhaps make a picture of it some other time," said Sheila, with her eyes cast down; and, as he was standing by her at the time, he took her hand, and pressed it, and said, "I hope so."

Then, that night! Did not every hour produce some new and wonderful scene; or was it only that each minute grew to be so precious, and that the enchantment of Sheila's presence filled the air around him? There was no moon; but the stars shone over the bay and the harbour, and the dusky hills beyond the castle. Every few seconds the lighthouse at Arnish Point sent out its wild glare of orange fire into the heart of the clear darkness, and then as suddenly faded out and left the eyes too bewildered to make out the configuration of the rocks. All over the north-west there still remained the pale glow of the twilight; and somehow Lavender seemed to think that that strange glow belonged to Sheila's home in the west, and that the people in Stornoway knew nothing of the wonders of Loch Roag, and of the strange nights there. Was he likely ever to forget?

"Good-bye, Sheila," he said, next morning, when the last signal had been given, and the *Clansman* was about to move from her moorings.

She had bidden good-bye to Ingram already, but, somehow, she could not speak to his companion just at this last moment. She pressed his hand, and turned away, and went ashore with her father. Then the big steamer throbbed its way out of the harbour; and by

and by the island of Lewis lay but as a thin blue cloud along the horizon, and who could tell that human beings, with strange hopes, and fancies, and griefs, were hidden away in that pale line of vapour?

CHAPTER IX.

"Farewell, Mackrimmon!"

A NIGHT journey from Greenock to London is a sufficiently prosaic affair in ordinary circumstances; but it need not be always so. What if a young man, apparently occupied in making himself comfortable, and in talking nonsense to his friend and companion, should be secretly calculating how the journey could be made most pleasant to a bride, and that bride his bride? Lavender made experiments with regard to the ways and tempers of guards—he borrowed planks of wood with which to make sleeping-couches of an ordinary first-class carriage—he bribed a certain official to have the compartment secured—he took note of the time when, and the place where, refreshments could be procured—all these things he did, thinking of Sheila. And when Ingram, sometimes surprised by his good-nature, and occasionally remonstrating against his extravagance, at last fell asleep on the more or less comfortable cushions stretched across the planks, Lavender would have him wake up again, that he might be induced to talk once more about Sheila. Ingram would make use of some wicked words, rub his eyes, ask what was the last station they had passed, and then begin to preach to Lavender about the great obligations he was under to Sheila, and what would be expected of him in after-times.

"You are coming away just now," he would say, while Lavender, who could not sleep at all, was only anxious that Sheila's name should be mentioned, "enriched with a greater treasure than falls to the lot of most men. If you know how to value that treasure, there is not a king or emperor in Europe who should not envy you."

"But don't you think I value it?" the other would say, anxiously.

"We'll see about that afterwards, by what you do. But in the meantime you don't know what you have won. You don't know the magnificent single-heartedness of that girl, her keen sense of honour, nor the strength of character, of judgment, and decision that lies beneath her apparent simplicity. Why, I have known Sheila, now—— But what's the use of talking?"

"I wish you would talk, though, Ingram," said his companion, quite submissively. "You have known her longer than I. I am willing to believe all you say of her, and anxious, indeed, to know as much about her as possible. You don't suppose I fancy she is anything less than you say?"

"Well," said Ingram, doubtfully, "perhaps not. The worst of it is that you take such odd readings of people. However, when you marry her, as I now hope you may, you will soon find out; and then, if you are not grateful—if you don't understand and appreciate *then* the fine qualities of this girl, the sooner you put a millstone round your neck and drop over Chelsea Bridge the better."

"She will always have in you a good friend to look after her when she comes to London."

"Oh, don't imagine I mean to thrust myself in at your breakfast-table to give you advice. If a husband and wife cannot manage their own affairs satisfactorily, no third person can; and I am getting to be an elderly man, who likes peace, and comfort, and his own quiet."

"I wish you wouldn't talk such nonsense," said Lavender, impetuously. "You know you are bound to marry—and the woman you ask to marry you will be a precious fool if she refuses. I don't know, indeed, how you and Sheila ever escaped——"

"Look here, Lavender," said his companion, speaking in a somewhat impatient way, "if you marry Sheila Mackenzie, I suppose I may see something of both of you from time to time. But you are naturally jealous and exacting, as is the way with many good fellows who have had too much of their own way in the world; and if you start off with the notion now that Sheila and I might ever have married, or that such a thing was ever thought of by either of us, the certain consequence will be that you will become jealous of me, and that, in time, I shall have to stop seeing either of you, if you happen to be living in London."

"And if ever the time comes," said Lavender, lightly, "when I prove myself such a fool, I hope I shall remember that a millstone can be bought in Victoria-road, and that Chelsea Bridge is handy."

"All right: I'm going to sleep."

For some time after Ingram was permitted to rest in peace; and it was not until they had reached some big station or other, towards morning, that he woke. Lavender had never closed his eyes.

"Haven't you been asleep?"

"No."

"What's the matter now?"

"My aunt."

"You seem to have acquired a trick recently of looking at all the difficulties of your position at once. Why don't you take them singly! You've just got rid of Mackenzie's opposition—that might have contented you for a while."

"I think the best plan will be to say nothing of this to my aunt at present. I think we ought to get married first, and when I take Sheila to see her as my wife, what can she say then?"

"But what is Sheila likely to say before then? And Sheila's father? You must be out of your mind."

"There will be a pretty scene, then, when I tell her."

"Scenes don't hurt anybody, unless when they end in brickbats or decanters. Your aunt must know you would marry some day."

"Yes, but you know whom she wished me to marry."

"That is nothing. Every old lady has a fancy for imagining possible marriages; but your aunt is a reasonable woman, and could not possibly object to your marrying a girl like Sheila."

"Oh, couldn't she? Then you don't know her. *'Frank, my dear, what are the arms borne by your wife's family?' 'My dear aunt, I will describe them to you as becomes a dutiful nephew. The arms are quarterly: first and fourth, vert, a herring, argent; second and third, azure, a solan-goose, volant, or. The crest, out of a crown vallery, argent, a cask of whisky, gules. Supporters, dexter, a gillie, sinister, a fisherman.'*"

"And a very good coat-of-arms too. You might add the motto *Ultimus regum.* Or *Atavis editus regibus.* Or *Tyrrhena regum progenies.* To think that your aunt would forbid your wedding a king's daughter!"

"I should wed the king's daughter, aunt or no aunt, in any case; but you see, it would be uncommonly awkward—just as old Mackenzie would want to know something more particular about my circumstances—and he might ask for references to the old lady herself, just as if I were a tenant about to take a house——"

"I have given him enough references. Go to sleep; and don't bother yourself."

But now Ingram felt himself just as unable as his companion to escape into unconsciousness, and so he roused himself thoroughly, and began to talk about Lewis, and Borva, and the Mackenzies, and the duties and responsibilities Lavender would undertake in marrying Sheila.

"Mackenzie," he said, "will expect you to live in Stornoway at least half the year, and it will be very hard on him if you don't."

"Oh, as to that," said the other, "I should have no objection; but, you see, if I am to get married I really think I ought to try to get into some position of earning my own living, or helping towards it, you know. I begin to see how galling this sort of dependence on my aunt might be, if I wished to act for myself. Now if I were to begin to do anything, I could not go and bury myself in Lewis for half the year—just at first; by and by, you know, it might be different. But don't you think I ought to begin and do something?"

"Most certainly. I have often wished you had been born a carpenter, or painter, or glazier."

"People are not born carpenters or glaziers, but sometimes they are born painters. I think I have been born nothing; but I am willing to try, more especially as I think Sheila would like it."

"I know she would."

"I will write and tell her the moment I get to London."

"I would fix first what your occupation was to be, if I were you. There is no hurry about telling Sheila; although she will be very glad to get as much news of you as possible, and I hope you will spare no time or trouble in pleasing her in that line. By the way, what an infamous shame it was of you to go and gammon old Mackenzie into the belief that he can read poetry: why, he will make that girl's life a burden to her. I heard him propose to read 'Paradise Lost' to her as soon as the rain sets in."

"I didn't gammon him," said Lavender, with a laugh. "Every man thinks he can read poetry better than every other man, even as every man fancies that no one gets cigars as good and as cheap as he does, and that no one can drive a dog-cart safely but himself. My talking about his reading was not as bad as Sheila's persuading him that he can play whist. Did you ever know a man who did not believe that everybody else's reading of poetry was affected and unbearable? I know Mackenzie must have been reading poetry to Sheila long before I mentioned it to him."

"But that suggestion about his resonant voice and the Crystal Palace!"

"That was a joke."

"He did not take it as a joke, and neither did Sheila."

"Well, Sheila would believe that her father could command the Channel Fleet, or turn out the present Ministry, or build a bridge to America, if only anybody hinted it to her. Touching that Crystal Palace: Did you observe how little notion of size she could have got from pictures when she asked me if the Crystal Palace was much bigger than the hot-houses at Lewis Castle?"

"What a world of wonder the girl is coming into!" said the other, absently. "But it will be all lit up by one sun, if only you take care of her, and justify her belief in you."

"I have not much doubt," said Lavender, with a certain modest confidence in his manner which had repeatedly of late pleased his friend.

Even Sheila herself could scarcely have found London more strange than did the two men who had just returned from a month's sojourn in the northern Hebrides. The dingy trees in Euston Square, the pale sunlight that shone down on the grey pavements, the noise of the omnibuses and carts, the multitude of strangers, the blue and mist-like smoke that hung about Tottenham Court Road—all were as strange to them as the sensation of sitting in a hansom and being driven along by an unseen driver. Lavender confessed afterwards that he was pervaded by an odd sort of desire to know whether there was anybody in London at all like Sheila. Now and again a smartly-dressed girl passed along the pavement—what was it that made the difference between her and that other girl whom he had just left? Yet he wished to have the

difference as decided as possible. When some bright, fresh-coloured, pleasant-looking girl passed, he was anxious to prove to himself that she was not to be compared with Sheila. Where, in all London, could you find eyes that told so much? He forgot to place the speciality of Sheila's eyes in the fact of their being a dark grey blue under black eyelashes. What he did remember was that no eyes could possibly say the same things to him as they had said. And where, in all London, was the same sweet aspect to be found, or the same unconsciously proud and gentle demeanour, or the same tender friendliness expressed in a beautiful face? He would not say anything against London women, for all that. It was no fault of theirs that they could not be sea-kings' daughters, with the courage, and frankness, and sweetness of the sea gone into their blood. He was only too pleased to have proved to himself—by looking at some half-dozen pretty shop-girls—that not in London was there anyone to compare with Princess Sheila.

For many a day thereafter Ingram had to suffer a good deal of this sort of lover's logic, and bore it with great fortitude. Indeed, nothing pleased him more than to observe that Lavender's affection, so far from waning, engrossed more and more of his thought and his time; and he listened with unfailing good-nature and patience to the perpetual talk of his friend about Sheila, and her home, and the future that might be in store for both of them. If he had accepted half the invitations to dinner sent down to him at the Board of Trade by his friend, he would scarcely ever have been out of Lavender's club. Many a long evening they passed in this way—either in Lavender's rooms

in King Street or in Ingram's lodgings in Sloane Street. Ingram was content to lie in a chair and smoke, sometimes putting in a word of caution to bring Lavender back from the romantic Sheila to the real Sheila, sometimes smiling at some wild proposal or statement on the part of his friend, but always glad to see that the pretty idealisms planted during their stay in the far North were in no danger of dying out down here in the South. Those were great days, too, when a letter arrived from Sheila. Nothing had been said about their corresponding; but Lavender had written shortly after his arrival in London, and Sheila had answered for her father and herself. It wanted but a very little amount of ingenuity to continue the interchange of letters thus begun; and when the well-known envelope arrived, high holiday was immediately proclaimed by the recipient of it. He did not show Ingram these letters, of course; but the contents of them were soon bit by bit revealed. He was also permitted to see the envelope, as if Sheila's handwriting had some magical charm about it. Sometimes, indeed, Ingram had himself a letter from Sheila; and that was immediately shown to Lavender. Was he pleased to find that these communications were excessively business-like—describing how the fishing was going on, what was doing in the schools, and how John the Piper was conducting himself, with talk about the projected telegraphic cable, the shooting in Harris, the health of Bras, and other esoteric matters?

Lavender's communications with the King of Borva were of a different nature. Wonderful volumes on building, agriculture, and what not, tobacco hailing from certain royal sources in the neighbourhood of

the Pyramids, and now and again a new sort of rifle or some fresh invention in fishing-tackle—these were the sort of things that found their way to Lewis. And then, in reply, came haunches of venison, and kegs of rare whisky, and skins of wild animals, which, all very admirable in their way, were a trifle cumbersome in a couple of modest rooms in King Street, St. James's. But here Lavender hit upon a happy device. He had long ago talked to his aunt of the mysterious potentate in the far North, who was the ruler of man, beast, and fish, and who had an only daughter. When these presents arrived, Mrs. Lavender was informed that they were meant for her; and was given to understand that they were the propitiatory gifts of a half-savage sovereign who wished to seek her friendship. In vain did Ingram warn Lavender of the possible danger of this foolish joke. The young man laughed, and would come down to Sloane Street with another story of his success as an envoy of the distant king.

And so the months went slowly by; and Lavender raved about Sheila, and dreamed about Sheila, and was always going to begin some splendid achievement for Sheila's sake, but never just managed to begin. After all, the future did not look very terrible; and the present was satisfactory enough. Mrs. Lavender had no objection whatever to listening to his praises of Sheila, and had even gone the length of approving of the girl's photograph when it was shown her. But at the end of six months, Lavender suddenly went down to Sloane Street, found Ingram in his lodgings, and said—

"Ingram, I start for Lewis to-morrow."

"The more fool you," was the complacent reply.

"I can't bear this any longer; I must go and see her."

"You'll have to bear worse if you go. You don't know what getting to Lewis is in the winter. You'll be killed with cold before you see the Minch."

"I can stand a good bit of cold, when there's a reason for it," said the young man; "and I have written to Sheila to say I should start to-morrow."

"In that case I had better make use of you. I suppose you won't mind taking up to Sheila a sealskin jacket that I have bought for her."

"That you have bought for her!" said the other.

How could he have spared £15 out of his narrow income for such a present! And yet he laughed at the idea of his ever having been in love with Sheila.

Lavender took the sealskin jacket with him, and started on his journey to the North. It was certainly all that Ingram had prophesied, in the way of discomfort, hardship, and delay. But one forenoon, Lavender, coming up from the cabin of the steamer into which he had descended to escape from the bitter wind and the sleet, saw before him a strange thing. In the middle of the black sea, and under a dark grey sky, lay a long wonder-land of gleaming snow. Far as the eye could see the successive headlands of pale white jutted out into the dark ocean, until in the south they faded into a grey mist and became invisible. And when they got into Stornoway harbour, how black seemed the waters of the little bay, and the hulls of the boats, and the windows of the houses, against the blinding white of the encircling hills!

"Yes," said Lavender to the captain, "it will be a cold drive across to Loch Roag. I shall give Mackenzie's man a good dram before we start."

But it was not Mr. Mackenzie's notion of hospitality to send Duncan to meet an honoured guest; and ere the vessel was fast moored, Lavender had caught sight of the well-known pair of horses, and the brown waggonette, and Mackenzie stamping up and down in the trampled snow. And this figure close down to the edge of the quay? Surely there was something about the thick grey shawl, the white feather, the set of the head that he knew!

"Why, Sheila!" he cried, jumping ashore before the gangway was shoved across, "whatever made you come to Stornoway on such a day?"

"And it is not much my coming to Stornoway if you will come all the way from England to the Lewis," said Sheila, looking up with her bright and glad eyes.

For six months he had been trying to recall the tones of her voice, in looking at her picture, and had failed; now he fancied that she spoke more sweetly and musically than ever.

"Ay, ay," said Mackenzie, when he had shaken hands with the young man, "it wass a piece of foolishness her coming over to meet you in Styornoway; but the girl will be neither to hold nor to bind when she teks a foolishness into her head."

"Is this the character I hear of you, Sheila?" he said; and Mackenzie laughed at his daughter's embarrassment, and said she was a good lass for all that, and bundled both the young folks into the inn, where luncheon had been provided, with a blazing fire in the room, and a kettle of hot water steaming beside it.

When they got to Borva, Lavender began to see that Mackenzie had laid the most subtle plans for reconciling him to the hard weather of these northern

winters; and the young man, nothing loth, fell into his ways, and was astonished at the amusement and interest that could be got out of a residence in this bleak island at such a season. Mackenzie discarded at once the feeble protections against cold and wet which his guest had brought with him. He gave him a pair of his own knickerbockers and enormous boots; he made him wear a frieze coat borrowed from Duncan; he insisted on his turning down the flap of a sealskin cap and tying the ends under his chin; and thus equipped they started on many a rare expedition round the coast. But on their first going out, Mackenzie, looking at him, said with some chagrin—

"Will they wear gloves when they go shooting in your country?"

"Oh," said Lavender, "these are only a pair of old dog-skins I use chiefly to keep my hands clean. You see I have cut out the trigger-finger. And they keep your hands from being numbed, you know, with the cold or the rain."

"There will be not much need of that after a little while," said Mackenzie; and, indeed, after half-an-hour's tramping over snow and climbing over rocks, Lavender was well inclined to please the old man by tossing the gloves into the sea, for his hands were burning with heat.

Then the pleasant evenings!—after all the fatigues of the day were over, clothes changed, dinner despatched, and Sheila at the open piano in that warm little drawing-room, with its strange shells, and fish, and birds.

"Love in thine eyes for ever plays;
He in thy snowy bosom strays,"

they sang, just as in the bygone times of summer; and now old Mackenzie had got on a bit further in his musical studies, and could hum with the best of them—

"He makes thy rosy lips his care,
And walks the mazes of thy hair."

There was no winter at all in the snug little room, with its crimson fire, and closed shutters, and songs of happier times. "When the rosy morn appearing" had nothing inappropriate in it; and if they particularly studied the words of "O wert thou in the cauld blast," it was only that Sheila might teach her companion the Scotch pronunciation, as far as she knew it. And once, half in joke, Lavender said he could believe it was summer again if Sheila had only on her slate-grey silk dress, with red ribbon round her neck; and sure enough, after dinner, she came down in that dress, and Lavender took her hand and kissed it in gratitude. Just at that moment, too, Mackenzie began to swear at Duncan for not having brought him his pipe, and not only went out of the room to look for it, but was a full half-hour in finding it. When he came in again, he was singing carelessly,

"Love in thine eyes for ever plays,"

just as if he had got his pipe round the corner.

For it had been all explained by this time, you know; and Sheila had in a couple of trembling words pledged away her life, and her father had given his consent. More than that he would have done for the girl, if need were; and when he saw the perfect happiness shining in her eyes—when he saw that, through some vague feelings of compunction, or gratitude, or even exuberant joy, she was more than

usually affectionate towards himself—he grew reconciled to the ways of Providence, and was ready to believe that Ingram had done them all a good turn in bringing his friend from the South with him. If there was any haunting fear at all, it was about the possibility of Sheila's husband refusing to live in Stornoway, even for half the year, or a portion of the year; but did not the young man express himself as delighted beyond measure with Lewis, and the Lewis people, and the sports and scenery, and climate of the island? If Mackenzie could have bought fine weather at £20 a day, Lavender would have gone back to London with the conviction that there was only one thing better than Lewis in summer-time, and that was Lewis in time of snow and frost.

The blow fell. One evening a distinct thaw set in; during the night the wind went round to the south-west; and in the morning, lo! the very desolation of desolation, Suainabhal, Mealasabhal, Cracabhal, were all hidden away behind dreary folds of mist; a slow and steady rain poured down from the lowering skies on the wet rocks, the marshy pasture-land, and the leafless bushes; the Atlantic lay dark under a grey fog, and you could scarcely see across the loch in front of the house. Sometimes the wind freshened a bit, and howled about the house, or dashed showers against the streaming panes; but ordinarily there was no sound but the ceaseless hissing of the rain on the wet gravel at the door and the rush of the waves along the black rocks. All signs of life seemed to have fled from the earth and the sky. Bird and beast had alike taken shelter; and not even a gull or a sea-

pye crossed the melancholy lines of moorland which were half obscured by the mist of the rain.

"Well, it can't be fine weather always," said Lavender, cheerfully, when Mackenzie was affecting to be greatly surprised to find such a thing as rain in the island of Lewis.

"No, that iss quite true," said the old man; "it wass ferry good weather we were having since you hef come here. And what iss a little rain?—oh, nothing at all. You will see it will go away whenever the wind goes round."

With that Mackenzie would again go out to the front of the house, take a turn up and down the wet gravel, and pretend to be scanning the horizon for signs of a change. Sheila, a good deal more honest, went about her household duties, saying merely to Lavender—

"I am very sorry the weather has broken; but it may clear before you go away from Borva."

"Before I go? Do you expect it to rain for a week?"

"Perhaps it will not; but it is looking very bad to-day," said Sheila.

"Well, I don't care," said the young man, "though it should rain the skies down, if only you would keep indoors, Sheila. But you do go out in such a reckless fashion. You don't seem to reflect that it is raining."

"I do not get wet," she said.

"Why, when you came up from the shore half an hour ago, your hair was as wet as possible, and your face all red and gleaming with the rain."

"But I am none the worse. And I am not wet now. It is impossible that you will always keep in a

room, if you have things to do; and a little rain does not hurt anyone."

"It occurs to me, Sheila," he observed, slowly, "that you are an exceedingly obstinate and self-willed young person, and that no one has ever exercised any proper control over you."

She looked up for a moment, with a sudden glance of surprise and pain; then she saw in his eyes that he meant nothing, and she went forward to him, putting her hand in his hand, and saying with a smile—

"I am very willing to be controlled."

"Are you really?"

"Yes."

"Then hear my commands. You shall *not* go out in time of rain without putting something over your head, or taking an umbrella. You shall *not* go out in the *Maighdean-mhara* without taking some one with you besides Mairi. You shall never, if you are away from home, go within fifty yards of the sea, so long as there is snow on the rocks——"

"But that is so very many things already—is it not enough?" said Sheila.

"You will faithfully remember and observe these rules?"

"I will."

"Then you are a more obedient girl than I imagined, or expected; and you may now, if you are good, have the satisfaction of offering me a glass of sherry and a biscuit, for, rain or no rain, Lewis is a dreadful place for making people hungry."

Mackenzie need not have been afraid. Strange as it may appear, Lavender was well content with the

wet weather. No depression, or impatience, or remonstrance was visible on his face when he went to the blurred windows, day after day, to see only the same desolate picture—the dark sea, the wet rocks, the grey mists over the moorland, and the shining of the red gravel before the house. He would stand with his hands in his pocket, and whistle "Love in thine eyes for ever plays," just as if he were looking out on a cheerful summer sunrise. When he and Sheila went to the door, and were received by a cold blast of wet wind and a driving shower of rain, he would slam the door to again with a laugh, and pull the girl back into the house. Sometimes she would not be controlled; and then he would accompany her about the garden as she attended to her duties, or would go down to the shore with her, to give Bras a run. From these excursions he returned in the best of spirits, with a fine colour in his face; until, having got accustomed to heavy boots, impervious frieze, and the discomfort of wet hands, he grew to be about as indifferent to the rain as Sheila herself, and went fishing, or shooting, or boating with much content, whether it was wet or dry.

"It has been the happiest month of my life—I know that," he said to Mackenzie, as they stood together on the quay at Stornoway.

"And I hope you will hef many like it in the Lewis," said the old man, cheerfully.

"I think I should soon learn to become a Highlander up here," said Lavender, "if Sheila would only teach me the Gaelic."

"The Gaelic!" cried Mackenzie, impatiently. "The Gaelic! It is none of the gentlemen who will come

here in the autumn will want the Gaelic; and what for would you want the Gaelic—ay, if you was staying here the whole year round?"

"But Sheila will teach me all the same—won't you, Sheila?" he said, turning to his companion, who was gazing somewhat blankly at the rough grey sea beyond the harbour.

"Yes," said the girl: she seemed in no mood for joking.

Lavender returned to town more in love than ever; and soon the news of his engagement was spread abroad—he nothing loth. Most of his club-friends laughed, and prophesied it would come to nothing. How could a man in Lavender's position marry anybody but an heiress? He could not afford to go and marry a fisherman's daughter. Others came to the conclusion that artists, and writers, and all that sort of people, were incomprehensible; and said "Poor beggar!" when they thought of the fashion in which Lavender had ruined his chances in life. His lady-friends, however, were much more sympathetic. There was a dash of romance in the story; and would not the Highland girl be a curiosity for a little while after she came to town? Was she like any of the pictures Mr. Lavender had hanging up in his rooms? Had he not even a sketch of her? An artist, and yet not have a portrait of the girl he had chosen to marry? Lavender had no portrait of Sheila to show. Some little photographs he had he kept for his own pocket-book; while in vain had he tried to get some sketch or picture that would convey to the little world of his friends and acquaintances some notion of his future

bride. They were left to draw on their imagination for some presentiment of the coming princess.

He told Mrs. Lavender, of course. She said little; but sent for Edward Ingram. Him she questioned in a cautious, close, and yet apparently indifferent way; and then merely said that Frank was very impetuous; that it was a pity he had resolved on marrying out of his own sphere of life; but that she hoped the young lady from the Highlands would prove a good wife to him.

"I hope he will prove a good husband to her," said Ingram, with unusual sharpness.

"Frank is very impetuous;" that was all Mrs. Lavender would say.

By and by, as the spring drew on, and the time of the marriage was coming nearer, the important business of taking and furnishing a house for Sheila's reception occupied the attention of the young man from morning till night. He had been somewhat disappointed at the cold fashion in which his aunt looked upon his choice—admitting everything he had to say in praise of Sheila, but never expressing any approval of his conduct or hope about the future. But now she showed herself most amiably and generously disposed. She supplied the young man with abundant funds wherewith to furnish the house according to his own fancy. It was a small house—fronting a somewhat common-place square in Notting Hill—but it was to be a miracle of artistic adornment inside. He tortured himself for days over rival shades and hues; he drew designs for the chairs; he himself painted a good deal of panelling; and, in short, gave up his whole time to making Sheila's future home

beautiful. His aunt regarded these preparations with little interest; but she certainly gave her nephew ample means to indulge the eccentricities of his fancy.

"Isn't she a dear old lady?" said Lavender one night to Ingram. "Look here. A cheque, received this morning, for £200, for plate and glass."

Ingram looked at the bit of pale green paper.

"I wish you had earned the money yourself, or done without the plate until you could buy it with your own money."

"Oh, confound it, Ingram, you carry your puritanical theories too far! Doubtless I shall earn my own living by and by. Give me time."

"It is now nearly a year since you thought of marrying Sheila Mackenzie; and you have not done a stroke of work yet."

"I beg your pardon. I have worked a good deal of late, as you will see when you come up to my rooms."

"Have you sold a single picture since last summer?"

"I cannot make people buy my pictures if they don't choose to do so."

"Have you made any effort to get them sold, or to come to any arrangement with any of the dealers?"

"I have been too busy of late—looking after this house, you know," said Lavender, with an air of apology.

"You were not too busy to paint a fan for Mrs. Lorraine, that people say must have occupied you for months."

Lavender laughed.

"Do you know, Ingram, I think you are jealous of Mrs. Lorraine, on account of Sheila. Come, you shall go and see her——"

"No, thank you."

"Are you afraid of your Puritan principles giving way?"

"I am afraid that you are a very foolish boy," said the other, with a good-humoured shrug of resignation; "but I hope to see you mend when you marry."

"Ah, then you *will* see a difference!" said Lavender, seriously; and so the dispute ended.

It had been arranged that Ingram should go up to Lewis to the marriage, and, after the ceremony in Stornoway, return to Borva with Mr. Mackenzie, to remain with him a few days. But at the last moment Ingram was summoned down to Devonshire, on account of the serious illness of some near relative, and accordingly Frank Lavender started by himself to bring back with him his Highland bride. His stay in Borva was short enough on this occasion. At the end of it there came a certain wet and boisterous day, the occurrences in which he afterwards remembered as if they had taken place in a dream. There were many faces about, a confusion of tongues, a good deal of dram-drinking, a skirl of pipes, and a hurry through the rain; but all these things gave place to the occasional glance that he got from a pair of timid and trusting, and beautiful eyes. Yet Sheila was not Sheila in that dress of white, with her face a trifle pale. She was more his own Sheila when she had donned her rough garments of blue, and when she stood on the wet deck of the vessel, with a great

grey shawl around her, talking to her father with a brave effort at cheerfulness, although her lip would occasionally quiver as one or other of her friends from Borva—many of them barefooted children—came up to bid her good-bye. Her father talked rapidly, with a grand affectation of indifference. He swore at the weather. He bade her see that Bras was properly fed; and if the sea broke over his box in the night, he was to be rubbed dry, and let out in the morning for a run up and down the deck. She was not to forget the parcel directed to an innkeeper at Oban. They would find Oban a very nice place at which to break the journey to London; but as for Greenock—Mackenzie could find no words with which to describe Greenock. And then, in the midst of all this, Sheila suddenly said—

"Papa, when does the steamer leave?"

"In a few minutes. They have got nearly all the cargo on board."

"Will you do me a great favour, papa?"

"Ay, but what is it, Sheila?"

"I want you not to stay here till the boat sails, and then you will have all the people on the quay vexing you when you are going away. I want you to bid good-bye to us now, and drive away round to the point, and we shall see you the last of all, when the steamer has got out of the harbour."

"Ferry well, Sheila, I will do that," he said, knowing well why the girl wished it.

So father and daughter bade good-bye to each other; and Mackenzie went on shore with his face down, and said not a word to any of his friends on the quay, but got into the waggonette, and lashing the

horses, drove rapidly away. As he had shaken hands with Lavender, Lavender had said to him, "Well, we shall soon be back in Borva again to see you;" and the old man had merely tightened the grip of his hand as he left.

The roar of the steampipe ceased, the throb of the engines struck the water, and the great steamer steamed away from the quay and out of the plain of the harbour into a wild world of grey waves, and wind, and rain. There stood Mackenzie as they passed, the dark figure clearly seen against the pallid colours of the dismal day; and Sheila waved a handkerchief to him, until Stornoway, and its lighthouse, and all the promontories and bays of the great island had faded into the white mists that lay along the horizon. And then her arm fell to her side; and for a moment she stood bewildered, with a strange look in her eyes, of grief, and almost of despair.

"Sheila, my darling, you must go below now," said her companion; "you are almost dead with cold."

She looked at him for a moment, as though she had scarcely heard what he said. But his eyes were full of pity for her; he drew her closer to him, and put his arms round her, and then she hid her head in his bosom, and sobbed there like a child.

CHAPTER X.

Fairy-land.

"WELCOME to London——!"

He was about to add "Sheila," but suddenly stopped. The girl, who had hastily come forward to

meet him, with a glad look in her eyes, and with both hands outstretched, doubtless perceived the brief embarrassment of the moment, and was perhaps a little amused by it. But she took no notice of it; she merely advanced to him, and caught both his hands, and said—

"And are you very well?"

It was the old and familiar salutation, uttered in the same odd, gentle, insinuating fashion, and in the same low and sweet voice. Sheila's stay in Oban, and the few days she had already spent in London, had not taught her the difference between "very" and "ferry."

"It is so strange to hear you speak in London——, Mrs. Lavender," he said, with rather a wry face as he pronounced her full and proper title.

And now it was Sheila's turn to look a bit embarrassed, and colour, and appear uncertain whether to be vexed or pleased, when her husband himself broke in with his usual good-natured impetuosity.

"I say, Ingram, don't be absurd. Of course you must call her Sheila—unless when there are people here, and then you may please yourself. Why, the poor girl has enough of strange things and names about her already. I don't know how she keeps her head. It would bewilder me, I know; but I can see that, after she has stood at the window for a time, and begun to get dazed by all the wonderful sights and sounds outside, she suddenly withdraws and fixes all her attention on some little domestic duty, just as if she were hanging on to the practical things of life to assure herself it isn't all a dream. Isn't that so, Sheila?" he said, putting his hand on her shoulder.

"You ought not to watch me like that," she said, with a smile. "But it is the noise that is most bewildering. There are many places I will know already when I see them, many places and things I have known in pictures; but now the size of them, and the noise of carriages, and the people always passing—and always different—always strangers, so that you never see the same people any more——. But I am getting very much accustomed to it."

"You are trying very hard to get accustomed to it, any way, my good girl," said her husband.

"You need not be in a hurry; you may begin to regret some day that you have not a little of that feeling of wonder left," said Ingram. "But you have not told me anything of what you think about London, and of how you like it, and how you like your house, and what you have done with Bras, and a thousand other things——"

"I will tell you all that directly, when I have got for you some wine and some biscuits."

"Sheila, you can ring for them," said her husband; but she had by that time departed on her mission. Presently she returned, and waited upon Ingram just as if she had been in her father's house in Borva, with the gentlemen in a hurry to go out to the fishing, and herself the only one who could serve them.

She put a small table close by the French window; she drew back the curtains as far as they would go to show the sunshine of a bright forenoon in May lighting up the trees in the square and gleaming on the pale and tall fronts of the houses beyond; and she wheeled in three low easy-chairs so as to front this comparatively cheerful prospect. Somehow or other

it seemed quite natural that Sheila should wheel in those chairs. It was certainly no disrespect on the part of either her husband or her visitor which caused both of them to sit still and give her her own way about such things. Indeed, Lavender had not as yet ever attempted to impress upon Sheila the necessity of cultivating the art of helplessness. That, with other social graces, would perhaps come in good time. She would soon acquire the habits and ways of her friends and acquaintances, without his trying to force upon her a series of affectations, which would only embarrass her and cloud the perfect frankness and spontaneity of her nature. Of one thing he was quite assured—that, whatever mistakes Sheila might make in society, they would never render her ridiculous. Strangers might not know the absolute sincerity of her every word and act, which gave her a courage that had no fear of criticism, but they could at least see the simple grace and dignity of the girl, and that natural ease of manner which is mainly the result of a thorough consciousness of honesty. To burden her with rules and regulations of conduct, would be to produce the very catastrophes he wished to avoid. Where no attempt is made, failure is impossible; and he was meanwhile well content that Sheila should simply appear as Sheila, even although she might draw in a chair for a guest, or so far forget her dignity as to pour out some wine for her husband.

"After all, Sheila," said Lavender, "hadn't I better begin and tell Ingram about your surprise and delight when you came near Oban, and saw the tall hotels, and the trees? It was the trees, I think, that struck you most; because, you know, those in Lewis—well,

to tell the truth—the fact is, the trees of Lewis are not just—they cannot be said to be——"

"You bad boy, to say anything against the Lewis!" exclaimed Sheila: and Ingram held that she was right; and that there were certain sorts of ingratitude more disgraceful than others, and that this was just about the worst.

"Oh, I have brought all the good away from Lewis," said Lavender, with a careless impertinence.

"No," said Sheila, proudly. "You have not brought away my papa; and there is not anyone in this country I have seen as good as he is."

"My dear, your experience of the thirty millions of folks in these islands is quite convincing. I was wholly in the wrong; and if you forgive me, we shall celebrate our reconciliation in a cigarette—that is to say, Ingram and I will perform the rites, and you can look on."

So Sheila went away to get the cigarettes also.

"You don't say you smoke in your drawing-room, Lavender?" said Ingram, mindful of the fastidious ways of his friend even when he had bachelor's rooms in King Street.

"Don't I, though? I smoke everywhere—all over the place. Don't you see, we have no visitors yet. No one is supposed to know we have come South. Sheila must get all sorts of things before she can be introduced to my friends and my aunt's friends, and the house must be put to rights, too. You wouldn't have her go to see my aunt in that sailor's costume she used to rush about in up in Lewis?"

"That is precisely what I would have," said In-

gram; "she cannot look more handsome in any other dress."

"Why, my aunt would fancy I had married a savage—I believe she fears something of the sort now."

"And you haven't told even her that you are in London?"

"No."

"Well, Lavender, that is a precious silly performance. Suppose she hears of your being in town, what will you say to her?"

"I should tell her I wanted a few days to get my wife properly dressed before taking her about."

Ingram shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps you are right. Perhaps, indeed, it would be better if you waited six months before you introduced Sheila to your friends. At present you seem to be keeping the footlights turned down, until everything is ready for the first scene, and then Sheila is to burst upon society in a blaze of light and colour. Well, that is harmless enough; but look here. You don't know much about her yet—you will be naturally anxious to hear what the audience, as it were, say of her—and there is just a chance of your unconsciously adopting their impressions and opinions of Sheila, seeing that you have no very fixed ones of your own. Now what your social circumstances think about her is a difficult thing to decide; and I confess I would rather have seen you remain six months in Lewis before bringing her up here."

Ingram was at least a candid friend. It was not the first, nor the hundredth time, that Frank Lavender had to endure small lectures, uttered in a slow,

deliberate voice, and yet with an indifference of manner which showed that Ingram cared very little how sharply his words struck home. He rarely even apologized for his bluntness. These were his opinions; Lavender could take them or leave them as he liked. And the younger man, after finding his face flush a bit on being accused of wishing to make a dramatic impression with Sheila's entrance into London society, laughed in an embarrassed way, and said—

"It is impossible to be angry with you, Ingram, and yet you do talk so absurdly. I wonder who is likely to know more about the character of a girl than her own husband!"

"You may in time; you don't now," said Ingram, carefully balancing a biscuit on the point of his finger.

"The fact is," said Lavender, with good-natured impatience, "you are the most romantic card I know, and there is no pleasing you. You have all sorts of exalted notions about things—about sentiments, and duties, and so forth. Well, all that is true enough, and would be right enough, if the world were filled with men and women like yourself: but then it isn't, you see; and one has to give in to conventionalities of dress, and living, and ceremonies, if one wants to retain one's friends. Now, I like to see you going about with that wide-awake—it suits your brown complexion and beard—and that stick that would do for herding sheep; and the costume looks well, and is business-like and excellent when you're off for a walk over the Surrey downs or lying on the river-banks about Henley or Cookham; but it isn't, you know, the sort of costume for a stroll in the Park——"

"Whenever God withdraws from me my small

share of common sense," said Ingram, slowly, "so far that I shall begin to think of having my clothes made for the purpose of walking in Hyde Park—well——"

"But don't you see," said Lavender, "that one must meet one's friends, especially when one is married; and when you know that at a certain hour in the forenoon they are all to be found in a particular place, and that a very pleasant place—and that you will do yourself good by having a walk in the fresh air, and so forth—I really don't see anything very immoral in going down for an hour or so to the Park."

"Don't you think the pleasure of seeing one's friends might be postponed till one had done some sort of a good day's work?" said Ingram, mindful of the goodly promise of the youth, and knowing well that Sheila expected the husband of her choice to make a great name for himself one of these days.

"There now," cried Lavender, "that is another of your delusions. You are always against superstitions, and yet you make work a fetish. You do with work just as women do with duty—they carry about with them a convenient little god, and they are always worshipping it with small sacrifices, and complimenting themselves on a series of little martyrdoms that are of no good to anybody. Of course, duty wouldn't be duty if it wasn't disagreeable, and when they go nursing the sick—and they could get it better done for fifteen shillings a week by somebody else—they don't mind coming back to their families with the seeds of typhus about their gowns; and when they crush the affections in order to worship at the shrine of duty, they don't consider that they may be making

martyrs of other folks who don't want martyrdom, and get no sort of pleasure out of it. Now, what in all the world is the good of work as work? I believe myself that work is an unmistakeable evil, involving all sorts of jealousy, and greed, and envy; but when it is a necessity, I suppose you get some sort of selfish satisfaction in overcoming it; and doubtless if there was any immediate necessity in my case—I don't deny the necessity may arise, and that I should like nothing better than to work for Sheila's sake——"

"Now you are coming to the point," said Ingram, who had been listening with his usual patience to his friend's somewhat chaotic speculations. "Perhaps you may have to work for your wife's sake and your own; and I confess I am surprised to see you so content with your present circumstances. If your aunt's property legally reverted to you—if you had any sort of family claim on it—that would make some little difference; but you know that any sudden quarrel between you might leave you penniless to-morrow——"

"In which case I should begin to work to-morrow; and I should come to you for my first commission."

"And you shouldn't have it. I would have you to go and fight the world for yourself—without which a man knows nothing of himself or of his relations with those around him——"

"Frank, dear, here are the cigarettes," said Sheila, at this point; and as she came and sat down, the discussion ceased.

For Sheila began to tell her friend of all the strange adventures that had befallen her since she left the far island of Lewis—how she had seen with fear the great mountains of Skye lit up by the wild glare of a stormy sunrise; how she had beheld with astonish-

ment the great firwoods of Armadale; and how green and beautiful were the shores of the Sound of Mull. And then, Oban! — with its shining houses, its blue bay, and its magnificent trees all lit up by a fair and still sunshine. She had not imagined there was anywhere in the world so beautiful a place; and could scarcely believe that London itself was more rich and noble, and impressive. For there were beautiful ladies walking along the broad pavements, and there were shops with large windows that seemed to contain everything that the mind could desire, and there was a whole fleet of yachts in the bay. But it was the trees, above all, that captivated her; and she asked if they were lords who owned those beautiful houses built up on the hill and half-smothered among lilacs, and ash-trees, and rowan-trees, and ivy.

"My darling," Lavender had said to her, "if your papa were to come and live here, he could buy half-a-dozen of those cottages, gardens and all. They are mostly the property of well-to-do shopkeepers. If this little place takes your fancy, what will you say when you go South—when you see Wimbledon, and Richmond, and Kew, with their grand old commons and trees? Why, you could hide Oban in a corner of Richmond Park!"

"And my papa has seen all those places?"

"Yes. Don't you think it strange he should have seen them all, and known he could live in any of them, and then gone away back to Borva?"

"But what would the poor people have done if he had never gone back?"

"Oh, some one else would have taken his place."

"And then, if he were living here, or in London, he might have got tired, and he might have wished to

go back to the Lewis and see all the people he knew; and then he would come among them like a stranger, and have no house to go to."

Then Lavender said, quite gently—

"Do you think, Sheila, you will ever tire of living in the South?"

The girl looked up quickly, and said, with a sort of surprised questioning in her eyes—

"No, not with you. But then we shall often go to the Lewis?"

"Oh, yes," her husband said, "as often as we can conveniently. But it will take some time at first, you know, before you get to know all my friends who are to be your friends, and before you get properly fitted into your social circle. That will take you a long time, Sheila, and you may have many annoyances or embarrassments to encounter; but you won't be very much afraid, my girl?"

Sheila merely looked up to him; there was no fear in the frank, brave eyes.

The first large town she saw struck a cold chill to her heart. On a wet and dismal afternoon they sailed into Greenock. A heavy smoke hung about the black building-yards and the dirty quays; the narrow and squalid streets were filled with mud, and only the poorer sections of the population waded through the mire or hung disconsolately about the corners of the thoroughfares. A gloomier picture could not well be conceived, and Sheila, chilled with the long and wet sail, and bewildered by the noise and bustle of the harbour, was driven to the hotel with a sore heart and a downcast face.

"This is not like London, Frank," she said, pretty nearly ready to cry with disappointment.

"This? No. Well, it is like a part of London, certainly, but not the part you will live in."

"But how can we live in the one place without passing the other and being made miserable by it? There was no part of Oban like this."

"Why, you will live miles away from the docks and quays of London. You might live for a lifetime in London without ever knowing it had a harbour. Don't you be afraid, Sheila. You will live in a district where there are far finer houses than any you saw in Oban, and far finer trees; and within a few minutes' walk you will find great gardens and parks, with lakes in them and wild fowl, and you will be able to teach the boys about how to set the helm and the sails when they are launching their small boats."

"I should like that," said Sheila, with her face brightening.

"Perhaps you would like a boat yourself?"

"Yes," she said, frankly. "If there were not many people there, we might go out sometimes in the evening——"

Her husband laughed, and took her hand.

"You don't understand, Sheila. The boats the boys have are little things a foot or two long—like the one in your papa's bedroom in Borva. But many of the boys would be greatly obliged to you if you would teach them how to manage the sails properly; for sometimes dreadful shipwrecks occur."

"You must bring them to our house; I am very fond of little boys—when they begin to forget to be shy, and let you become acquainted with them."

"Well," said Lavender, "I don't know many of the boys who sail boats in the Serpentine; you will have to make their acquaintance yourself. But I know

one boy whom I must bring to the house. He is a German-Jew boy, who is going to be another Mendelssohn, his friends say. He is a pretty boy, with ruddy, brown hair, big black eyes, and a fine forehead; and he really sings and plays delightfully. But you know, Sheila, you must not treat him as a boy, for he is over fifteen, I should think; and if you were to kiss him——"

"He might be angry," said Sheila, with perfect simplicity.

"I might," said Lavender; and then, noticing that she seemed a little surprised, he merely patted her head and bade her go and get ready for dinner.

Then came the great climax of Sheila's southward journey—her arrival in London. She was all anxiety to see her future home; and as her luck would have it, there was a fair Spring morning shining over the city. For a couple of hours before she had sat and looked out of the carriage-window as the train whirled rapidly through the scarcely-awakened country; and she had seen the soft and beautiful landscapes of the South lit up by the early sunlight. How the bright little villages shone, with here and there a gilt weather-cock glittering on the spire of some small grey church; while as yet in many valleys a pale grey mist lay along the bed of the level streams or clung to the dense woods on the upland heights. Which was the more beautiful — the sharp, clear picture, with its brilliant colours and its awakening life, or the more mystic landscape over which was still drawn the tender veil of even the morning haze? She could not tell. She only knew that England, as she then saw it, seemed a great country that was very beautiful, that had few inhabitants, and that was still, and

sleepy, and bathed in sunshine. How happy must the people be in those quiet green valleys, by the side of slow and smooth rivers, and mid great woods and avenues of stately trees, the like of which she had not imagined even in her dreams!

But from the moment that they got out at Euston Square, she seemed a trifle bewildered, and could only do implicitly as her husband bade her—clinging to his hand, for the most part, as if to make sure of guidance. She did, indeed, glance somewhat nervously at the hansom into which Lavender put her, apparently asking how such a tall and narrow two-wheeled vehicle could be prevented toppling over. But when he, having sent on all their luggage by a respectable old four-wheeler, got into the hansom beside her, and put his hand inside her arm, and bade her be of good cheer that she should have such a pleasant morning to welcome her to London, she said "Yes," mechanically, and only looked out in a wistful fashion at the great houses and trees of Euston Square, the mighty and roaring stream of omnibuses, the droves of strangers mostly clad in black, as if they were going to church, and the pale blue smoke that seemed to mix with the sunshine and make it cold and distant.

They were in no hurry, these two, on that still morning, and so, to impress Sheila all at once with a sense of the greatness and grandeur of London, he made the cabman cut down by Park Crescent and Portland Place to Regent Circus. They then went along Oxford Street; and there were crowded omnibuses taking young men into the City; while all the pavements were busy with hurrying passers-by. What multitudes of unknown faces—unknown to her and unknown to each other! These people did not speak

—they only hurried on, each intent upon his own affairs, caring nothing, apparently, for the din around them, and looking so strange and sad in their black clothes, in the pale and misty sunlight.

"You are in a trance, Sheila," he said.

She did not answer. Surely she had wandered into some magical city; for now the houses on one side of the way suddenly ceased, and she saw before her a great and undulating extent of green, with a border of beautiful flowers, and with groups of trees that met the sky all along the southern horizon. Did the green and beautiful country she had seen shoot in thus into the heart of the town, or was there another city far away on the other side of the trees? The place was almost as deserted as those still valleys she had passed by in the morning. Here, in the street, there was the roar of a passing crowd; but over there was a long and almost deserted stretch of Park, with winding roads and umbrageous trees, on which the wan sunlight fell from between loose masses of half-golden cloud.

Then they passed Kensington Gardens; and there were more people walking down the broad highways between the elms.

"You are getting nearly home now, Sheila," he said. "And you will be able to come and walk in these avenues whenever you please."

Was this, then, her home?—this section of a barrack-row of dwellings, all alike in steps, pillars, doors, and windows? When she got inside, the servant who had opened the door bobbed a curtsey to her: should she shake hands with her, and say, "And are you ferry well?" But at this moment Lavender came running up the steps, playfully hurried

her into the house and up the stairs, and led her into her own drawing-room.

"Well, my girl, what do you think of your home, now that you see it?"

Sheila looked round, timidly. It was not a big room; but it was a palace in height, and grandeur, and colour, compared with that little museum in Borva in which Sheila's piano stood. It was all so strange and beautiful — the split pomegranates and quaint leaves on the upper part of the walls, and underneath a dull slate colour where the pictures hung—the curious painting on the frames of the mirrors—the brilliant curtains, with their stiff and formal patterns. It was not very much like a home as yet—it was more like a picture that had been carefully planned and executed; but she knew how he had thought of pleasing her in choosing these things, and, without saying a word, she took his hand and kissed it. And then she went to one of the three tall French windows, and looked out on the square. There, between the trees, was a space of beautiful soft green; and some children, dressed in bright dresses, and attended by a governess in sober black, had just begun to play croquet. An elderly lady, with a small white dog, was walking along one of the gravelled paths. An old man was pruning some bushes.

"It is very still and quiet here," said Sheila. "I was afraid we should have to live in that terrible noise always."

"I hope you won't find it dull, my darling," he said.

"Dull, when you are here?"

"But I cannot always be here, you know?"

She looked up.

"You see, a man is so much in the way if he is

dawdling about a house all day long. You would begin to regard me as a nuisance, Sheila; and would be for sending me out to play croquet with those young Broughtons merely that you might get the rooms dusted. Besides you know I couldn't work here—I must have a studio of some sort in the neighbourhood, of course. And then you will give me your orders in the morning as to when I am to come round for luncheon or dinner."

"And you will be alone all day at your work?"

"Yes."

"Then I will come and sit with you, my poor boy," she said.

"Much work I should do in that case!" he said. "But we'll see. In the meantime go upstairs and get your things off; that young person below has breakfast ready, I daresay."

"But you have not shown me yet where Mr. Ingram lives," said Sheila, before she went to the door.

"Oh, that is miles away. You have only seen a little bit of London yet. Ingram lives about as far away from here as the distance you have just come, but in another direction."

"It is like a world made of houses," said Sheila, "and all filled with strangers. But you will take me to see Mr. Ingram?"

"By and by, yes. But he is sure to drop in on you as soon as he fancies you are settled in your new home."

And here, at last, was Mr. Ingram come; and the mere sound of his voice seemed to carry her back to Borva, so that, in talking to him and waiting on him as of old, she would scarcely have been surprised if her father had walked in to say that a coaster was

making for the harbour, or that Duncan was going over to Stornoway, and Sheila should have to give him commissions. Her husband did not take the same interest in the social and political affairs of Borva that Mr. Ingram did. Lavender had made a pretence of assisting Sheila in her work among the poor people; but the effort was a hopeless failure. He could not remember the name of the family that wanted a new boat, and was visibly impatient when Sheila would sit down to write out, for some aged crone, a letter to her grandson in Canada. Now Ingram, for the mere sake of occupation, had qualified himself during his various visits to Lewis so that he might have become the Home Minister of the King of Borva; and Sheila was glad to have one attentive listener as she described all the wonderful things that had happened in the island since the previous summer.

But Ingram had got a full and complete holiday on which to come up and see Sheila; and he had brought with him the wild and startling proposal that, in order that she should take her first plunge into the pleasures of civilized life, her husband and herself should drive down to Richmond and dine at the Star and Garter.

"What is that?" said Sheila.

"My dear girl," said her husband, seriously, "your ignorance is something fearful to contemplate. It is quite bewildering. How can a person who does not know what the Star and Garter is, be told what the Star and Garter is?"

"But I am willing to go and see," said Sheila.

"Then I must look after getting a brougham," said Lavender, rising.

"A brougham on such a day as this?" exclaimed

Ingram. "Nonsense! get an open trap of some sort —and Sheila, just to please me, will put on that very blue dress she used to wear in Borva, and the hat and the white feather, if she has got it——"

"Perhaps you would like me to put on a sealskin cap and a red handkerchief instead of a collar," observed Lavender, calmly.

"You may do as you please. Sheila and I are going to dine at the Star and Garter."

"May I put on that blue dress?" said the girl, going up to her husband.

"Yes, of course, if you like," said Lavender, meekly, going off to order the carriage, and wondering by what route he could drive those two maniacs down to Richmond so that none of his friends should see them.

When he came back again, bringing with him a landau which could be shut up for the homeward journey at night, he had to confess that no costume seemed to suite Sheila so well as the rough sailor-dress; and he was so pleased with her appearance, that he consented at once to let Bras go with them in the carriage, on condition that Sheila should be responsible for him. Indeed, after the first shiver of driving away from the Square was over, he forgot that there was much unusual about the look of this odd pleasure-party. If you had told him, eighteen months before, that on a bright day in May, just as people were going home from the Park for luncheon, he would go for a drive in a hired trap with one horse, his companions being a man with a brown wide-awake, a girl dressed as though she were the owner of a yacht, and an immense deer-hound, and that in this fashion, he would dare to drive up to the Star and Garter and order dinner, he would have bet five

hundred to one that such a thing would never occur so long as he preserved his senses. But somehow he did not mind much. He was very much at home with those two people beside him; the day was bright and fresh; the horse went a good pace; and once they were over Hammersmith Bridge and out among fields and trees, the country looked exceedingly pretty, and all the beauty of it was mirrored in Sheila's eyes.

"I can't quite make you out in that dress, Sheila," he said. "I am not sure whether it is real and business-like, or a theatrical costume. I have seen girls on Ryde Pier with something of the same sort on, only a good deal more pronounced, you know—and they looked like sham yachtsmen; and I have seen stewardesses wearing that colour and texture of cloth——"

"But why not leave it as it is," said Ingram, "a solitary costume produced by certain conditions of climate and duties, acting in conjunction with a natural taste for harmonious colouring and simple form? That dress, I will maintain, sprang as naturally from the salt sea as Aphrodite did; and the man who suspects artifice in it, or invention, has had his mind perverted by the scepticism of modern society——"

"Is my dress so very wonderful?" said Sheila, with a grave complaisance. "I am pleased that the Lewis has produced such a fine thing, and perhaps you would like me to tell you its history. It was my papa bought a piece of blue serge in Stornoway. It cost *3s. 6d.* a yard, and a dressmaker in Stornoway cut it for me, and I made it myself. That is all the history of the wonderful dress."

Suddenly Sheila seized her husband's arm. They had got down to the river by Mortlake; and there, on

the broad bosom of the stream, a long and slender boat was shooting by, pulled by four oarsmen clad in white flannel.

"How can they go out in such a boat?" said Sheila, with a great alarm visible in her eyes: "it is scarcely a boat at all; and if they touch a rock, or if the wind catches them——"

"Don't be frightened, Sheila," said her husband. "They are quite safe. There are no rocks in our rivers; and the wind does not give us squalls here like those on Loch Roag. You will see hundreds of those boats by and by, and perhaps you yourself will go out in one——"

"Oh, never, never!" she said, almost with a shudder.

"Why, if the people here heard you, they would not know how brave a sailor you are. You are not afraid to go out at night by yourself on the sea; and you won't go on a smooth inland river——"

"But those boats—if you touch them they must go over."

She seemed glad to get away from the river. She could not be persuaded of the safety of the slender craft of the Thames; and, indeed, for some time after seemed so strangely depressed that Lavender begged and prayed of her to tell him what was the matter. It was simple enough. She had heard him speak of his boating adventures. Was it in such boats as that she had just seen; and might he not be some day going out in one of them, and an accident—the breaking of an oar—a gust of wind—

There was nothing for it but to reassure her by a solemn promise that in no circumstance whatever, would he, Lavender, go into a boat without her ex-

press permission; whereupon Sheila was as grateful to him as though he had dowered her with a kingdom.

This was not the Richmond Hill of her fancy—this spacious height, with its great mansions, its magnificent elms, and its view of all the westward and wooded country, with the blue-white streak of the river winding through the green foliage. Where was the farm? The famous Lass of Richmond Hill must have lived on a farm; but here, surely, were the houses of great lords and nobles, which had apparently been there for years and years. And was this really an hotel that they stopped at—this great building, that she could only compare to Stornoway Castle?

"Now, Sheila," said Lavender, after they had ordered dinner, and gone out, "mind you keep a tight hold on that leash, for Bras will see strange things in the Park."

"It is I who will see strange things," she said; and the prophecy was amply fulfilled. For as they went along the broad path, and came better into view of the splendid undulations of woodland, and pasture, and fern; when, on the one hand, they saw the Thames, far below them, flowing through the green and spacious valley, and, on the other hand, caught some dusky glimpse of the far white houses of London—it seemed to her that she had got into a new world, and that this world was far more beautiful than the great city she had left. She did not care so much for the famous view from the Hill. She had cast one quick look to the horizon, with one throb of expectation that the sea might be there. There was no sea there; only the faint blue of long lines of country apparently without limit. Moreover, over the western landscape a

faint haze prevailed, that increased in the distance and softened down the more distant woods into a sober grey. That great extent of wooded plain, lying sleepily in its pale mists, was not so cheerful as the scene around her, where the sunlight was sharp and clear, the air fresh, the trees flooded with a pure and bright colour. Here, indeed, was a cheerful and beautiful world; and she was full of curiosity to know all about it and its strange features. What was the name of this tree, and how did it differ from that? Were not these rabbits over by the fence; and did rabbits live in the midst of trees and bushes? What sort of wood was the fence made of; and was it not terribly expensive to have such a protection? Could not he tell the cost of a wooden fence? Why did they not use wire netting? Was not that a loch away down there, and what was its name? A loch without a name? Did the salmon come up to it; and did any sea-birds ever come inland and build their nests on its margin?

"Oh, Bras, you must come and look at the loch. It is a long time since you will see a loch."

And away she went through the thick breckan, holding on to the swaying leash that held the galloping greyhound, and running as swiftly as though she had been making down for the shore to get out the *Maighdean-mhara.*

"Sheila!" called her husband, "don't be foolish!"

"Sheila!" called Ingram, "have pity on an old man——"

Suddenly she stopped. A brace of partridges had suddenly sprung up at some little distance, and, with a wild whirr of their wings, were now directing their low and rapid flight towards the bottom of the valley.

"What birds are those?" she said, peremptorily.

She took no notice of the fact that her companions were pretty nearly too blown to speak. There was a brisk life and colour in her face; and all her attention was absorbed in watching the flight of the birds. Lavender fancied he saw in the fixed and keen look something of old Mackenzie's grey eye—it was the first trace of a likeness to her father he had seen.

"You bad girl," he said, "they are partridges."

She paid no heed to this reproach; for what were those other things over there underneath the trees? Bras had pricked up his ears, and there was a strange excitement in his look and in his trembling frame.

"Deer!" she cried, with her eyes as fixed as were those of the dog beside her.

"Well," said her husband, calmly, "what although they are deer?"

"But Bras——" she said; and with that she caught the leash with both her hands.

"Bras won't mind them, if you keep him quiet. I suppose you can manage him better than I can. I wish we had brought a whip."

"I would rather let him kill every deer in the Park than touch him with a whip," said Sheila, proudly.

"You fearful creature, you don't know what you say. That is high treason. If George Ranger heard you, he would have you hanged in front of the Star and Garter."

"Who is George Ranger?" said Sheila, with an air as if she had said, "*Do you know that I am the daughter of the King of Borva, and whoever touches me*

will have to answer to my papa, who is not afraid of any George Ranger."

"He is a great lord who hangs all persons who disturb the deer in this Park."

"But why do they not go away?" said Sheila, impatiently. "I have never seen any deer so stupid. It is their own fault if they are disturbed; why do they remain so near to people and to houses?"

"My dear child, if Bras wasn't here, you would probably find some of those deer coming up to see if you had any bits of sugar or pieces of bread about your pockets."

"Then they are like sheep, they are not like deer," she said with some contempt. "If I could only tell Bras that it is sheep he will be looking at, he would not look any more. And so small they are; they are as small as the roe; but they have horns as big as many of the red deer. Do the people eat them?"

"I suppose so."

"And what will they cost?"

"I am sure I can't tell you."

"Are they as good as the roe or the big deer?"

"I don't know that either. I don't think I ever ate fallow-deer. But you know they are not kept here for that purpose. A great many gentlemen in this country keep a lot of them in their parks, merely to look pretty. They cost a great deal more than they produce——"

"They must eat up a great deal of fine grass," said Sheila, almost sorrowfully. "It is a beautiful ground for sheep—no rushes, no peat-moss, only fine, good grass, and dry land. I should like my papa to see all this beautiful ground."

"I fancy he has seen it."

"Was my papa here?"

"I think he said so."

"And did he see those deer?"

"Doubtless."

"He never told me of them," she said, wondering that her papa had seen all these strange things without speaking of them.

By this time they had pretty nearly got down to the little lake; and Bras had been alternately coaxed and threatened into a quiescent mood. Sheila evidently expected to hear a flapping of sea-fowls' wings when they got near the margin; and looked all round for the first sudden dart from the banks. But a dead silence prevailed; and as there were neither fish nor birds to watch, she went along to a wooden bench, and sat down there, one of her companions on each hand. It was a pretty scene that lay before her—the small stretch of water ruffled with the wind, but showing a dash of blue sky here and there—the trees in the enclosure beyond clad in their summer foliage, the smooth greensward shining in the afternoon sunlight. Here, at least, was absolute quiet after the roar of London; and it was somewhat wistfully that she asked her husband how far this place was from her home, and whether, when he was at work, she could not come down here by herself.

"Certainly," he said, never dreaming that she would think of doing such a thing.

By and by they returned to the hotel, and while they sat at dinner a great fire of sunset spread over the west, and the far woods became of a rich purple, streaked here and there with lines of pale white mist. The river caught the glow of the crimson clouds

above, and shone duskily red amid the dark green of the trees. Deeper and deeper grew the colour of the sun as it sank to the horizon, until it disappeared behind one low bar of purple cloud; and then the wild glow in the west slowly faded away, the river became pallid and indistinct, the white mists over the distant woods seemed to grow denser, and then, as here and there a lamp was lit far down in the valley, one or two pale stars appeared in the sky overhead, and the night came on apace.

"It is so strange," Sheila said, "to find the darkness coming on, and not to hear the sound of the waves. I wonder if it is a fine night at Borva."

Her husband went over to her, and led her back to the table, where the candles, shining over the white cloth and the coloured glasses, offered a more cheerful picture than the deepening landscape outside. They were in a private room; so that, when dinner was over, Sheila was allowed to amuse herself with the fruit, while her two companions lit their cigars. Where was the quaint old piano, now; and the glass of hot whisky and water; and the "Lament of Monaltrie," or "Love in thine eyes for ever plays"? It seemed, but for the greatness of the room, to be a repetition of one of those evenings at Borva that now belonged to a far-off past. Here was Sheila, not minding the smoke, listening to Ingram as of old, and sometimes saying something in that sweetly-inflected speech of hers; here was Ingram, talking, as it were, out of a brown study, and morosely objecting to pretty nearly everything Lavender said, but always ready to prove Sheila right; and Lavender himself, as unlike a married man as ever, talking impatiently, impetuously, and wildly, except at such times as he said

something to his young wife, and then some brief smile and look, or some pat on the hand, said more than words. But where, Sheila may have thought, was the one wanting to complete the group? Has he gone down to Borvabost to see about the cargoes of fish to be sent off in the morning? Perhaps he is talking to Duncan outside about the cleaning of the guns, or making up cartridges in the kitchen. When Sheila's attention wandered away from the talk of her companions, she could not help listening for the sound of the waves; and as there was no such message coming to her from the great and wooded plain without, her fancy took her away across that mighty country she had travelled through, and carried her up to the island of Loch Roag, until she almost fancied she could smell the peat-smoke in the night-air, and listen to the sea, and hear her father pacing up and down the gravel outside the house, perhaps thinking of her as she was thinking of him.

This little excursion to Richmond was long remembered by those three. It was the last of their meetings before Sheila was ushered into the big world, to busy herself with new occupations and cares. It was a pleasant little journey throughout; for as they got into the landau to drive back to town, the moon was shining high up in the southern heavens, and the air was mild and fresh, so that they had the carriage opened, and Sheila, well wrapped up, lay and looked around her with a strange wonder and joy as they drove underneath the shadow of the trees and out again into the clear sheen of the night. They saw the river, too, flowing smoothly and palely down between its dark banks; and somehow here the silence checked them, and they hummed no more those duets

they used to sing up at Borva. Of what were they thinking, then, as they drove through the clear night, along the lonely road? Lavender, at least, was rejoicing at his great good fortune that he had secured for ever to himself the true-hearted girl who now sat opposite him, with the moonlight touching her face and hair; and he was laughing to himself at the notion that he did not properly appreciate her, or understand her, or perceive her real character. If not he, who then? Had he not watched every turn of her disposition, every expression of her wishes, every grace of her manner, and look of her eyes; and was he not overjoyed to find that the more he knew of her the more he loved her? Marriage had increased, rather than diminished, the mystery and wonder he had woven about her. He was more her lover now than he had been before his marriage. Who could see in her eyes what he saw? Elderly folks can look at a girl's eyes, and see that they are brown, or blue, or green, as the case may be; but the lover looks at them and sees in them the magic mirror of a hundred possible worlds. How can he fathom the sea of dreams that lies there, or tell what strange fancies and reminiscences may be involved in an absent look? Is she thinking of starlit nights on some distant lake; or of the old bygone days on the hills? All her former life is told there, and yet but half-told, and he longs to become possessed of all the beautiful past that she has seen. Here is a constant mystery to him, and there is a singular and wistful attraction for him in those still deeps where the thoughts and dreams of an innocent soul lie but half revealed. He does not see those things in the eyes of women he is not in love with; but when, in after years, he is carelessly regarding

this or the other woman, some chance look—some brief and sudden turn of expression—will recall to him, as with a stroke of lightning, all the old wonder-time, and his heart will go nigh to breaking to think that he has grown old, that he has forgotten so much, and that the fair, wild days of romance and longing are passed away for ever.

"Ingram thinks I don't understand you yet, Sheila," he said to her, after they had got home, and their friend had gone.

Sheila only laughed, and said—

"I don't understand myself, sometimes."

"Eh? what?" he cried. "Do you mean to say that I have married a conundrum? If I have, I don't mean to give you up, any way; so you may go and get me a biscuit, and a drop of the whisky we brought from the North with us. For you are a ministering angel, Sheila, and not a conundrum at all."

CHAPTER XI.

The first Plunge.

FRANK LAVENDER was a good deal more concerned than he chose to show about the effect that Sheila was likely to produce on his aunt; and when, at length, the day arrived on which the young folks were to go down to Kensington Gore, he had inwardly to confess that Sheila seemed a great deal less perturbed than himself. Her perfect calmness and self-possession surprised him. The manner in which she had dressed herself, with certain modifications which he could not help approving, according to the fashion of the time, seemed to him a miracle of dexterity; and how had she acquired the art of looking at ease in this attire,

which was much more cumbrous than that she had usually worn in Borva?

If Lavender had but known the truth, he would have begun to believe something of what Ingram had vaguely hinted. This poor girl was looking towards her visit to Kensington Gore as the most painful trial of her life. While she was outwardly calm and firm, and even cheerful, her heart sank within her as she thought of the dreaded interview. Those garments which she wore with such an appearance of ease and comfort had been the result of many an hour of anxiety; for how was she to tell, from her husband's raillery, what colours the terrible old lady in Kensington would probably like? He did not know that every word he said in joke about his aunt's temper, her peevish ways, the awful consequences of offending her, and so forth, were like so many needles stuck into the girl's heart, until she was ready to cry out to be released from this fearful ordeal. Moreover, as the day came near, what he could not see in her, she saw in him. Was she likely to be reassured when she perceived that her husband, in spite of all his fun, was really anxious; and when she knew that some blunder on her part might ruin him? In fact, if he had suspected for a moment that she was really trembling to think of what might happen, he might have made some effort to give her courage. But apparently Sheila was as cool and collected as if she had been going to see John the Piper. He believed she could have gone to be presented to the Queen without a single tremor of the heart.

Still, he was a man, and therefore bound to assume an air of patronage.

"She won't eat you, really," he said to Sheila, as

they were driving in a hansom down Kensington Palace Gardens. "All you have got to do is to believe in her theories of food. She won't make you a martyr to them. She measures every half-ounce of what she eats; but she won't starve you; and I am glad to think, Sheila, that you have brought a remarkably good and sensible appetite with you from Lewis. Oh, by the way, take care you say nothing against Marcus Aurelius."

"I don't know who he was, dear," observed Sheila, meekly.

"He was a Roman Emperor, and a philosopher. I suppose it was because he was an Emperor that he found it easy to be a philosopher. However, my aunt is awful nuts on Marcus Aurelius—I beg your pardon, you don't know the phrase. My aunt makes Marcus Aurelius her Bible, and she is sure to read you bits from him, which you must believe, you know."

"I will try," said Sheila, doubtfully; "but if——"

"Oh, it has nothing to do with religion. I don't think anybody knows what Marcus Aurelius means, so you may as well believe it. Ingram swears by him, but he is always full of odd crotchets."

"Does Mr. Ingram believe in Marcus Aurelius?" said Sheila, with some accession of interest.

"Why, he gave my aunt the book years ago—confound him!—and ever since she has been a nuisance to her friends. For my own part, you know, I don't believe that Marcus Aurelius was quite such an ass as Plato. He talks the same sort of perpetual commonplaces, but it isn't about the True, and the Good, and the Beautiful. Would you like me to repeat to you one of the Dialogues of Plato—about the immortality of Mr. Cole, and the moral effect of the South Kensington Museum?"

"No, dear, I shouldn't," said Sheila.

"You deprive yourself of a treat, but never mind. Here we are at my aunt's house."

Sheila timidly glanced at the place, while her husband paid the cabman. It was a tall, narrow, dingy-looking house of a dark brick, with some black-green ivy at the foot of the walls, and with crimson curtains formally arranged in every one of the windows. If Mrs. Lavender was a rich old lady, why did she live in such a gloomy building? Sheila had seen beautiful white houses in all parts of London—her own house, for example, was ever so much more cheerful than this one; and yet she had heard with awe of the value of this depressing little mansion in Kensington Gore.

The door was opened by a man, who showed them upstairs, and announced their names. Sheila's heart beat quickly. She entered the drawing-room with a sort of mist before her eyes; and found herself going forward to a lady who sat at the further end. She had a strangely vivid impression, amid all her alarm, that this old lady looked like the withered kernel of a nut. Or was she not like a cockatoo? It was through no anticipation of dislike to Mrs. Lavender that the imagination of the girl got hold of that notion. But the little old lady held her head like a cockatoo. She had the hard, staring, observant, and unimpressionable eyes of a cockatoo. What was there, moreover, about the decorations of her head that reminded one of a cockatoo when it puts up its crest and causes its feathers to look like sticks of celery?

"Aunt Lavender, this is my wife."

"I am glad to see you, dear," said the old lady, giving her hand, but not rising. "Sit down. When

you are a little nervous, you ought to sit down. Frank, give me that ammonia from the mantelpiece."

It was in a small glass phial, and labelled "Poison." She smelt the stopper, and then handed it to Sheila, telling her to do the same.

"Why did your maid do your hair in such a way?" she asked, suddenly.

"I haven't got a maid," said Sheila, "and I always do my hair so."

"Don't be offended. I like it. But you must not make a fool of yourself. Your hair is too much that of a country beauty going to a ball. Paterson will show you how to do your hair."

"Oh, I say, aunt," cried Lavender, with a fine show of carelessness, "you mustn't go and spoil her hair. I think it is very pretty as it is; and that woman of yours would simply go and make a mop of it. You'd think the girls now-a-days dressed their hair by shoving their head into a furze-bush and giving it a couple of turns."

She paid no heed to him, but turned to Sheila, and said—

"You are an only child?"

"Yes."

"Why did you leave your father?"

The question was rather a cruel one, and it stung Sheila into answering bravely—

"Because my husband wished me."

"Oh. You think your husband is to be the first law of your life?"

"Yes, I do."

"Even when he is only silly Frank Lavender!"

Sheila rose. There was a quivering of her lips, but no weakness in the proud, indignant look of her eyes.

"What you may say of me, that I do not care. But I will not remain to hear my husband insulted."

"Sheila," said Lavender, vexed and anxious, and yet pleased at the same time by the courage of the girl. "Sheila, it is only a joke—you must not mind—it is only a bit of fun——"

"I do not understand such jests," she said, calmly.

"Sit down, like a good girl," said the old lady, with an air of absolute indifference. "I did not mean to offend you. Sit down, and be quiet. You will destroy your nervous system if you give way to such impulses. I think you are healthy; I like the look of you; but you will never reach a good age, as I hope to do, except by moderating your passions. That is well; now take the ammonia again, and give it to me. You don't wish to die young, I suppose?"

"I am not afraid of dying," said Sheila.

"Ring the bell, Frank."

He did so, and a tall, spare, grave-faced woman appeared.

"Paterson, you must put luncheon on to two ten. I ordered it at one fifty, did I not?"

"Yes, m'm."

"See that it is served at two ten; and take this young lady and get her hair properly done, you understand? My nephew and I will wait luncheon for her."

"Yes, m'm."

Sheila rose, with a great swelling in her throat. All her courage had ebbed away. She had reflected how pained her husband would be if she did not please this old lady; and she was now prepared to do anything she was told, to receive meekly any remarks that might be made to her, to be quite obedient, and

gentle, and submissive. But what was this tall and terrible woman going to do to her? Did she really mean to cut away those great masses of hair to which Mrs. Lavender had objected? Sheila would have let her hair be cut willingly, for her husband's sake; but, as she went to the door, some wild and despairing notion came into her head of what her husband might think of her, when once she was shorn of this beautiful personal feature. Would he look at her with surprise—perhaps even with disappointment?

"Mind you don't keep luncheon late," he said to her, as she passed him.

She but indistinctly heard him, so great was the trembling within her. Her father would scarcely know his altered Sheila, when she went back to Borva; and what would Mairi say—Mairi who had many a time helped her to arrange those long tresses, and who was as proud of them as if they were her own? She followed Mrs. Lavender's tall maid up-stairs. She entered a small dressing-room, and glanced nervously round. Then she suddenly turned, looked for a moment at the woman, and said, with tears rushing up into her eyes—

"Does Mrs. Lavender wish me to cut my hair?"

The woman regarded her with astonishment.

"Cut, miss?—ma'am, I beg your pardon. No, ma'am, not at all. I suppose it is only some difference in the arrangement, ma'am. Mrs. Lavender is very particular about the hair; and she has asked me to show several ladies how to dress their hair in the way she likes. But perhaps you would prefer letting it remain as it is, ma'am?"

"Oh no, not at all!" said Sheila. "I should like to have it just as Mrs. Lavender wishes—in every way

just as she wishes. Only, it will not be necessary to cut any?"

"Oh no, miss—ma'am; and it would be a great pity, if I may say so, to cut *your* hair."

Sheila was pleased to hear that. Here was a woman who had a large experience in such matters, among those very ladies of her husband's social circle whom she had been a little afraid to meet. Mrs. Paterson seemed to admire her hair as much as the simple Mairi had done; and Sheila soon began to have less fear of this terrible tiring-woman, who forthwith proceeded with her task.

The young wife went down-stairs with a tower upon her head. She was very uncomfortable. She had seen, it is true, that this method of dressing the hair really became her—or, rather, would become her in certain circumstances. It was grand, imposing, statuesque; but then she did not feel statuesque just at this moment. She could have dressed herself to suit this style of hair; she could have worn it with confidence if she had got it up herself; but here she was the victim of an experiment—she felt like a schoolgirl about for the first time to appear in public in a long dress—and she was terribly afraid her husband would laugh at her. If he had any such inclination, he courteously suppressed it. He said the massive simplicity of this dressing of the hair suited her admirably. Mrs. Lavender said that Paterson was an invaluable woman; and then they went down to the dining-room on the ground-floor, where luncheon had been laid.

The man who had opened the door waited on the two strangers; the invaluable Paterson acted as a sort of henchwoman to her mistress, standing by her chair,

and supplying her wants. She also had the management of a small pair of silver scales, in which pretty nearly everything that Mrs. Lavender took in the way of solid food was carefully and accurately weighed. The conversation was chiefly alimentary; and Sheila listened with a growing wonder to the description of the devices by which the ladies of Mrs. Lavender's acquaintance were wont to cheat fatigue, or win an appetite, or preserve their colour. When, by accident, the girl herself was appealed to, she had to confess to an astonishing ignorance of all such resources. She knew nothing of the relative strengths and effects of wines; though she was frankly ready to make any experiment her husband recommended. She knew what camphor was, but had never heard of bismuth. On cross-examination, she had to admit that Eau de Cologne did not seem to her likely to be a pleasant liquor before going to a ball. Did she not know the effect on brown hair of washing it in soda-water every night? She was equably confessing her ignorance on all such points, when she was startled by a sudden question from Mrs. Lavender. Did she know what she was doing?

She looked at her plate; there was on it a piece of cheese to which she had thoughtlessly helped herself. Somebody had called it Roquefort—that was all she knew.

"You have as much there, child, as would kill a ploughman; and I suppose you would not have had the sense to leave it."

"Is it poison?" said Sheila, regarding her plate with horror.

"All cheese is. Paterson, my scales."

She had Sheila's plate brought to her, and the

proper modicum of cheese cut, weighed, and sent back.

"Remember, whatever house you are at, never to have more Roquefort than that."

"It would be simpler to do without it," said Sheila.

"It would be simple enough to do without a great many things," said Mrs. Lavender, severely. "But the wisdom of living is to enjoy as many different things as possible, so long as you do so in moderation, and preserve your health. You are young—you don't think of such things. You think, because you have good teeth and a clear complexion, you can eat anything. But that won't last. A time will come. Do you not know what the great Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, says?—'*In a little while thou wilt be nobody and nowhere, like Hadrianus and Augustus.*'"

"Yes," said Sheila.

She had not enjoyed her luncheon much—she would rather have had a ham sandwich and a glass of spring water on the side of a Highland hill than this varied and fastidious repast accompanied by a good deal of physiology—but it was too bad that, having successfully got through it, she should be threatened with annihilation immediately afterwards. It was no sort of consolation to her to know that she would be in the same plight with two emperors.

"Frank, you can go and smoke a cigar in the conservatory, if you please. Your wife will come upstairs with me and have a talk."

Sheila would much rather have gone into the conservatory also; but she obediently followed Mrs. Lavender upstairs and into the drawing-room. It was rather a melancholy chamber—the curtains shutting

out most of the daylight, and leaving you in a semi-darkness that made the place look big, and vague, and spectral. The little, shrivelled woman, with the hard and staring eyes, and silver-grey hair, bade Sheila sit down beside her. She herself sat by a small table, on which there were a tiny pair of scales, a bottle of ammonia, a fan, and a book bound in an old-fashioned binding of scarlet morocco and gold. Sheila wished this old woman would not look at her so. She wished there was a window open, or a glint of sunlight coming in somewhere. But she was glad that her husband was enjoying himself in the conservatory; and that for two reasons. One of them was that she did not like the tone of his talk while he and his aunt had been conversing together about cosmetics and such matters. Not only did he betray a marvellous acquaintance with such things, but he seemed to take an odd sort of pleasure in exhibiting his knowledge. He talked in a mocking way about the tricks of fashionable women that Sheila did not quite like: and of course she naturally threw the blame on Mrs. Lavender. It was only when this old woman exerted a godless influence over him that her good boy talked in such a fashion. There was nothing of that about him up in Lewis, nor yet at home, in a certain snug little smoking-room which these two had come to consider the most comfortable corner in the house. Sheila began to hate women who used lip-salve, and silently recorded a vow that never, never, never would she wear anybody's hair but her own.

"Do you suffer from headache?" said Mrs. Lavender, abruptly.

"Sometimes," said Sheila.

"How often? What is an average? Two a week?"

"Oh, sometimes I have not a headache for three or four months at a time."

"No toothache?"

"No."

"What did your mother die of?"

"It was a fever," said Sheila, in a low voice, "and she caught it while she was helping a family that was very bad with the fever."

"Does your father ever suffer from rheumatism?"

"No," said Sheila. "My papa is the strongest man in the Lewis, I am sure of that."

"But the strongest of us, you know," said Mrs. Lavender, looking hardly at the girl, "the strongest of us will die and go into the general order of the universe; and it is a good thing for you that, as you say, you are not afraid. Why should you be afraid? Listen to this passage."

She opened the red book, and guided herself to a certain page by one of a series of coloured ribbons.

"'*He who fears death either fears the loss of sensation or a different kind of sensation. But if thou shalt have no sensation, neither wilt thou feel any harm; and if thou shalt acquire another kind of sensation, thou wilt be a different kind of living being, and thou wilt not cease to live.*' Do you perceive the wisdom of that?"

"Yes," said Sheila, and her own voice seemed hollow and strange to her in this big and dimly-lit chamber. Mrs. Lavender turned over a few more pages, and proceeded to read again; and as she did so, in a low, unsympathetic, monotonous voice, a spell came over the girl, the weight at her heart grew more and more intolerable, and the room seemd to grow darker.

"'*Short then is the time which every man lives, and small the nook of the earth where he lives; and short too the longest posthumous fame, and even this only continued by a succession of poor human beings, who will very soon die, and who know not even themselves, much less him who died long ago.*' You cannot do better than ask your husband to buy you a copy of this book, and give it special study. It will comfort you in affliction, and reconcile you to whatever may happen to you. Listen. '*Soon will the earth cover us all; then the earth, too, will change, and the things also which result from change will continue to change for ever, and these again for ever. For if a man reflects on the changes and transformations which follow one another like wave after wave, and their rapidity, he will despise every thing which is perishable.*' Do you understand that?"

"Yes," said Sheila; and it seemed to her that she was being suffocated. Would not the grey walls burst asunder and show her one glimpse of the blue sky before she sank into unconsciousness? The monotonous tones of this old woman's voice sounded like the repetition of a psalm over a coffin. It was as if she was already shut out from life, and could only hear in a vague way the dismal words being chanted over her by the people in the other world. She rose, steadied herself for a moment by placing her hand on the back of the chair, and managed to say—

"Mrs. Lavender, forgive me for one moment; I wish to speak to my husband."

She went to the door—Mrs. Lavender being too surprised to follow her—and made her way downstairs. She had seen the conservatory at the end of a certain passage. She reached it; and then she

scarcely knew any more, except that her husband caught her in his arms as she cried—

"Oh, Frank, Frank, take me away from this house —I am afraid: it terrifies me!"

"Sheila, what on earth is the matter? Here, come out to the fresh air. By Jove, how pale you are! Will you have some water?"

He could not get to understand thoroughly what had occurred. What he clearly did learn from Sheila's disjointed and timid explanations was that there had been another "scene," and he knew that of all things in the world his aunt hated "scenes" the worst. As soon as he saw that there was little the matter with Sheila beyond considerable mental perturbation, he could not help addressing some little remonstrance to her, and reminding her how necessary it was that she should not offend the old lady upstairs.

"You should not be so excitable, Sheila," he said. "You take such exaggerated notions about things. I am sure my aunt meant nothing unkind. And what did you say when you came away?"

"I said I wanted to see you. Are you angry with me?"

"No, of course not. But then, you see, it is a little vexing—just at this moment——. Well, let us go upstairs at once, and try and make up some excuse, like a good girl—say you felt faint—anything——"

"And you will come with me?"

"Yes. Now do try, Sheila, to make friends with my aunt. She's not such a bad sort of creature as you seem to think. She's been very kind to me—she'll be very kind to you when she knows you more."

Fortunately no excuse was necessary; for Mrs. Lavender, in Sheila's absence, had arrived at the con-

clusion that the girl's temporary faintness was due to that piece of Roquefort.

"You see you must be careful," she said, when they entered the room. "You are unaccustomed to a great many things you will like afterwards."

"And the room is a little close," said Lavender.

"I don't think so," said his aunt, sharply; "look at the thermometer."

"I didn't mean for you and me, Aunt Lavender," he said, "but for her. Sheila has been accustomed to live almost wholly in the open air."

"The open air, in moderation, is an excellent thing. I go out myself every afternoon, wet or dry. And I was going to propose, Frank, that you should leave her here with me for the afternoon, and come back and dine with us at seven. I am going out at four thirty, and she could go with me."

"It's very kind of you, Aunt Lavender; but we have promised to call on some people close by here at four."

Sheila looked up, frightened. The statement was an audacious perversion of the truth. But then, Frank Lavender knew very well what his aunt meant by going into the open air every afternoon, wet or dry. At a certain hour her brougham was brought round; she got into it, and had both doors and windows hermetically sealed; and then, in a semi-somnolent state—she was driven slowly and monotonously round the Park. How would Sheila fare if she were shut up in this box? He told a lie with great equanimity, and saved her.

Then Sheila was taken away to get on her things; and her husband waited, with some little trepidation,

to hear what his aunt would say about her. He had not long to wait.

"She's got a bad temper, Frank."

"Oh, I don't think so, Aunt Lavender," he said, considerably startled.

"Mark my words, she's got a bad temper, and she is not nearly so soft as she tries to make out. That girl has a great deal of firmness, Frank."

"I find her as gentle and submissive as a girl could be—a little too gentle, perhaps, and anxious to study the wishes of other folks."

"That is all very well with you. You are her master. She is not likely to quarrel with her bread and butter. But you'll see if she does not hold her own when she gets among your friends."

"I hope she will hold her own," he said, with some unnecessary emphasis.

The old lady only shook her head.

"I am very sorry you should have taken a prejudice against her, Aunt," said he, presently.

"I take a prejudice? Don't let me hear the word again, Frank. You know I have no prejudices. If I cannot give you a reason for anything I believe, then I cease to believe it."

"You have not heard her sing," he said, suddenly remembering that this means of conquering the old lady had been neglected.

"I have no doubt she has many accomplishments," said Mrs. Lavender, coldly. "In time, I suppose, she will get over that extraordinary accent she has."

"Many people like it."

"I dare say you do, at present. But you may tire of it. You married her in a hurry; and you have not *got rid of* your romance yet. At the same time, I

dare say she is a very good sort of a girl, and will not disgrace you, if you instruct her and manage her properly. But remember my words, she has a temper, and you will find it out if you thwart her."

How sweet and fresh the air was, even in Kensington, when Sheila, having dressed and come downstairs, and having dutifully kissed Mrs. Lavender and bade her good-bye, went outside with her husband. It was like coming back to the light of day from inside the imaginary coffin in which she had fancied herself placed. A soft west wind was blowing over the Park, and a fairly clear sunlight shining on the May green of the trees. And then she hung on her husband's arm; and she had him to speak to instead of the terrible old woman who talked about dying.

And yet she hoped she had not offended Mrs. Lavender, for Frank's sake. What he thought about the matter he prudently resolved to conceal.

"Do you know that you have greatly pleased my aunt?" he said, without the least compunction. He knew if he breathed the least hint about what had actually been said, any possible amity between the two women would be rendered impossible for ever.

"Have I really?" said Sheila, very much astonished, but never thinking for a moment of doubting anything said by her husband.

"Oh, she likes you awfully!" he said, with an infinite coolness.

"I am so glad!" said Sheila, with her face brightening. "I was so afraid, dear, I had offended her. She did not look pleased with me."

By this time they had got into a hansom, and were driving down to the South Kensington Museum. Lavender would have preferred going into the Park;

but what if his aunt, in driving by, were to see them? He explained to Sheila the absolute necessity of his having to tell that fib about the four o'clock engagement: and when she heard described the drive in the closed brougham which she had escaped, perhaps she was not so greatly inclined as she ought to have been to protest against that piece of wickedness.

"Oh yes, she likes you awfully," he repeated, "and you must get to like her. Don't be frightened by her harsh way of saying things; it is only a mannerism. She is really a kind-hearted woman, and would do anything for me. That's her best feature, looking at her character from my point of view."

"How often must we go to see her?" asked Sheila.

"Oh, not very often. But she will get up dinner-parties, at which you will be introduced to batches of her friends. And then the best thing you can do is to put yourself under her instructions, and take her advice about your dress and such matters just as you did about your hair. That was very good of you."

"I am glad you were pleased with me," said Sheila. "I will do what I can to like her. But she must talk more respectfully of you."

Lavender laughed that little matter off as a joke; but it was far from being a joke to Sheila. She would try to like that old woman—yes; her duty to her husband demanded that she should. But there are some things which a wife—especially a girl who has been newly made a wife—will never forget; which, on the contrary, she will remember with burning cheeks, and anger, and indignation.

CHAPTER XII.

Transformation.

HAD she, then, Lavender could not help asking himself, a bad temper, or any other qualities or characteristics which were apparent to other people but not to him? Was it possible that, after all, Ingram was right; and that he had yet to learn the nature of the girl he had married? It would be unfair to say that he suspected something wrong about his wife—that he fancied she had managed to conceal something—merely because Mrs. Lavender had said that Sheila had a bad temper; but here was another person who maintained that, when the days of his romance were over, he would see the girl in another light.

Nay, as he continued to ask himself, had not the change already begun? He grew less and less accustomed to see in Sheila a beautiful wild sea-bird that had fluttered down, for a time, into a strange home in the South. He had not quite forgotten or abandoned those imaginative scenes in which the wonderful Sea-Princess was to enter crowded drawing-rooms and have all the world standing back to regard her and admire her, and sing her praises. But now he was not so sure that that would be the result of Sheila's entrance into society. As the date of a certain small dinner-party drew near, he began to wish she was more like the women he knew. He did not object to her strange sweet ways of speech, nor to her odd likes and dislikes, nor even to an unhesitating frankness that nearly approached rudeness sometimes in its scorn of all compromise with the truth; but how would others regard these things? He did not wish to gain the reputation of having married an oddity.

"Sheila," he said, on the morning of the day on which they were going to this dinner-party, "you should not say *like-a-ness*. There are only two syllables in *likeness*. It really does sound absurd to hear you say *like-a-ness*."

She looked up to him, with a quick trouble in her eyes. When had he objected to her manner of speaking before? And then she cast down her eyes again, and said, submissively—

"I will try not to speak like that. When you go out, I take a book and read aloud, and try to speak like you; but I cannot learn all at once."

"*I* don't mind," he said, in an apologetic fashion; and he took her hand as if to show that he meant no unkindness. "But you know other people must think it so odd. I wonder why you should always say *gyarden* for *garden* now, when it is just as easy to say *garden*."

Once upon a time he had said that there was no English like the English spoken in Lewis, and had singled out this very word as typical of one peculiarity in the pronunciation. But Sheila did not remind him of that. She only said, in the same simple fashion,—

"If you will tell me my faults, I will try to correct them."

She turned away from him, to get an envelope for a letter she had been writing to her father. He fancied something was wrong, and perhaps some touch of compunction smote him, for he went after her, and took her hand again, and said, gently,—

"Look here, Sheila. When I point out any trifles like that, you must not call them faults, and fancy I have any serious complaint to make. It is for your

own good that you should meet the people who will be your friends on equal terms, and give them as little as possible to talk about."

"I should not mind their talking about me," said Sheila, with her eyes still cast down; "but it is your wife they must not talk about, and, if you will tell me anything I do wrong, I will correct it."

"Oh, you must not think it is anything so serious as that. You will soon pick up from the ladies you may meet some notion of how you differ from them; and if you should startle or puzzle them a little at first by talking about the chances of the fishing, or the catching of wild duck, or the way to reclaim bog-land, you will soon get over all that."

Sheila said nothing; but she made a mental memorandum of three things she was not to speak about. She did not know why these subjects should be forbidden; but she was in a strange land, and going to see strange people, whose habits were different from hers. Moreover, when her husband had gone, she reflected that these people, having no fishing, and no peat-mosses, and no wild duck, could not possibly be interested in such affairs; and thus she fancied she perceived the reason why she should avoid all mention of those things.

When, in the evening, Sheila came down dressed and ready to go out, Lavender had to admit to himself that he had married an exceedingly beautiful girl, and that there was no country awkwardness about her manner, and no placid insipidity about her proud and handsome face. For one brief moment he triumphed in his heart, and had some wild glimpse of his old project of startling his small world with this vision from the northern seas. But when he got into the

hired brougham, and thought of the people he was about to meet, and of the manner in which they would carry away such and such impressions of the girl, he lost faith in that project. He would much rather have had Sheila unnoticeable and unnoticed—one who would quietly take her place at the dinner-table and attract no more special attention than the flowers, for example, which everyone would glance at with some satisfaction and then forget in the interest of talking and dining. He knew that Ingram would have taken Sheila anywhere, in her blue serge dress, and been quite content and oblivious of observation. But then Ingram was independent of those social circles in which a married man must move, and in which his position is often defined for him by the disposition and manners of his wife. Ingram did not know how women talked. It was for Sheila's own sake, he persuaded himself, that he was anxious about the impression she should make, and that he had drilled her in all that she should do and say.

"Above all things," he said, "mind you take no notice of me. Another man will take you in to dinner, of course; and I shall take in somebody else; and we shall not be near each other. But it's after dinner, I mean—when the men go into the drawing-room, don't you come and speak to me, or take any notice of me whatever."

"Mayn't I look at you, Frank?"

"If you do, you'll have half-a-dozen people, all watching you, saying to themselves or to each other, 'Poor thing, she hasn't got over her infatuation yet. Isn't it pretty to see how naturally her eyes turn towards him?'"

"But I shouldn't mind them saying that," said Sheila, with a smile.

"Oh, you mustn't be pitied in that fashion. Let them keep their compassion to themselves."

"Do you know, dear," said Sheila, very quietly, "that I think you exaggerate the interest people will take in me. I don't think I can be of such importance to them. I don't think they will be watching me as you fancy."

"Oh, you don't know," he said. "I know they fancy I have done something romantic, heroic, and all that kind of thing, and they are curious to see you."

"They cannot hurt me by looking at me," said Sheila, simply. "And they will soon find out how little there is to discover."

The house being in Holland Park, they had not far to go; and just as they were driving up to the door, a young man, slight, sandy-haired, and stooping, got out of a hansom and crossed the pavement."

"By Jove," said Lavender, "there is Redburn. That is Lord Arthur Redburn, Sheila: mind, if you should talk to him, not to call him 'my lord.'"

Sheila laughed, and said—

"How am I to remember all these things?"

They got into the house, and by and by Lavender found himself, with Sheila on his arm, entering a drawing-room to present her to certain of his friends. It was a large room, with a great deal of gilding and colour about it, and with a conservatory at the further end; but the blaze of light had not so bewildering an effect on Sheila's eyes as the appearance of two ladies to whom she was now introduced. She had heard much about them. She was curious to see them.

Many a time had she thought over the strange story Lavender had told her of the woman who heard that her husband was dying in hospital during the war, and started off, herself and her daughter, to find him out—how there was in the same hospital another dying man whom they had known some years before, and who had gone away because this daughter would not listen to him—how this man, being very near to death, begged that the girl would do him the last favour he would ask of her, of wearing his name and inheriting his property; and how, some few hours after the strange and sad ceremony had been performed, he breathed his last, happy in holding her hand. The father died next day; and the two widows were thrown upon the world, almost without friends, but not without means. This man Lorraine had been possessed of considerable wealth; and the girl who had suddenly become mistress of it found herself able to employ all possible methods of assuaging her mother's grief. They began to travel. The two women went from capital to capital, until at last they came to London; and here, having gathered around them a considerable number of friends, they proposed to take up their residence permanently. Lavender had often talked to Sheila about Mrs. Lorraine—about her shrewdness, her sharp sayings, and the odd contrast between this clever, keen, frank woman of the world and the woman one would have expected to be the heroine of a pathetic tale.

But were there two Mrs. Lorraines? That had been Sheila's first question to herself when, after having been introduced to one lady under that name, she suddenly saw before her another, who was introduced to her as Mrs. Kavanagh. The mother and daughter

were singularly alike. They had the same slight and graceful figure, which made them appear taller than they really were; the same pale, fine, and rather handsome features; the same large, clear, grey eyes; and apparently the same abundant mass of soft fair hair, heavily plaited in the latest fashion. They were both dressed entirely in black, except that the daughter had a band of blue round her slender waist. It was soon apparent, too, that the manner of the two women was singularly different; Mrs. Kavanagh bearing herself with a certain sad reserve that almost approached melancholy at times, while her daughter, with more life and spirit in her face, passed rapidly through all sorts of varying moods, until one could scarcely tell whether the affectation lay in a certain cynical audacity in her speech, or whether it lay in her assumption of a certain coyness and archness, or whether there was no affectation at all in the matter. However that might be, there could be no doubt about the sincerity of those grey eyes of hers. There was something almost cruelly frank in the clear look of them; and when her face was not lit up by some passing smile, the pale and fine features seemed to borrow something of severity from her unflinching, calm, and dispassionate habit of regarding those around her.

Sheila was prepared to like Mrs. Lorraine from the first moment she had caught sight of her. The honesty of the grey eyes attracted her. And, indeed, the young widow seemed very much interested in the young wife, and, so far as she could in that awkward period just before dinner, strove to make friends with her. Sheila was introduced to a number of people, but none of them pleased her as well as Mrs. Lorraine. Then dinner was announced, and Sheila found that

she was being escorted across the passage to the room on the other side by the young man whom she had seen get out of the hansom.

This Lord Arthur Redburn was the younger son of a great Tory Duke; he represented in the House a small country borough which his father practically owned; he had a fair amount of ability, an uncommonly high opinion of himself, and a certain affectation of being bored by the frivolous ways and talk of ordinary society. He gave himself credit for being the clever member of the family; and, if there was any cleverness going, he had it; but there were some who said that his reputation in the House and elsewhere as a good speaker was mainly based on the fact that he had an abundant assurance and was not easily put out. Unfortunately the public could come to no decision on the point, for the reporters were not kind to Lord Arthur; and the substance of his speeches was as unknown to the world as his manner of delivering them.

Now Mrs. Lorraine had intended to tell this young man something about the girl whom he was to take in to dinner; but she herself had been so occupied with Sheila that the opportunity escaped her. Lord Arthur accordingly knew only that he was beside a very pretty woman, who was a Mrs. Somebody—the exact name he had not caught—and that the few words she had spoken were pronounced in a curious way. Probably, he thought, she was from Dublin.

He also arrived at the conclusion that she was too pretty to know anything about the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, in which he was, for family reasons, deeply interested; and considered it more likely that she would prefer to talk about theatres and such things.

"Were you at Covent Garden last night?" he said.

"No," answered Sheila. "But I was there two days ago, and it is very pretty to see the flowers and the fruit, and they smell so sweetly as you walk through."

"Oh yes, it is delightful," said Lord Arthur. "But I was speaking of the theatre."

"Is there a theatre in there?"

He stared at her, and inwardly hoped she was not mad.

"Not in among the shops, no. But don't you know Covent Garden Theatre?"

"I have never been in any theatre, not yet," said Sheila.

And then it began to dawn upon him that he must be talking to Frank Lavender's wife. Was there not some rumour about the girl having come from a remote part of the Highlands? He determined on a bold stroke.

"You have not been long enough in London to see the theatres, I suppose."

And then Sheila, taking it for granted that he knew her husband very well, and that he was quite familiar with all the circumstances of the case, began to chat to him freely enough. He found that this Highland girl of whom he had heard vaguely was not at all shy. He began to feel interested. By and by he actually made efforts to assist her frankness by becoming equally frank, and by telling her all he knew of the things with which they were mutually acquainted. Of course, by this time, they had got up into the Highlands. The young man had himself been in the Highlands—frequently, indeed. He had never crossed to Lewis,

but he had seen the island from the Sutherlandshire coast. There were very many deer in Sutherlandshire, were there not? Yes, he had been out a great many times, and had his share of adventures. Had he not gone out before daylight, and waited on the top of a hill, hidden by some rocks, to watch the mists clear along the hill-sides and in the valley below? Did not he tremble when he fired his first shot, and had not something passed before his eyes so that he could not see for a moment whether the stag had fallen or was away like lightning down the bed of the stream? Somehow or other Lord Arthur found himself relating all his experiences as if he were a novice begging for the good opinion of a master. She knew all about it, obviously; and he would tell her his small adventures, if only that she might laugh at him. But Sheila did not laugh. She was greatly delighted to have this talk about the hills, and the deer, and the wet mornings. She forgot all about the dinner before her. The servants whipped off successive plates without her seeing anything of them; they received random answers about wine, so that she had three full glasses standing by her untouched. She was no more in Holland Park at that moment than were the wild animals of which she spoke so proudly and lovingly. If the great and frail masses of flowers on the table brought her any perfume at all, it was a scent of peat-smoke. Lord Arthur thought that his companion was a little too frank and confiding; or rather that she would have been, had she been talking to anyone but himself. He rather liked it. He was pleased to have established friendly relations with a pretty woman in so short a space; but ought not her husband to give her a hint about not admitting all and sundry to the enjoyment of these

favours? Perhaps, too, Lord Arthur felt bound to admit to himself there were some men who more than others inspired confidence in women. He laid no claims to being a fascinating person; but he had had his share of success; and considered that Sheila showed discrimination as well as good-nature in talking so to him. There was, after all, no necessity for her husband to warn her. She would know how to guard against admitting all men to a like intimacy. In the meantime, he was very well pleased to be sitting beside this pretty and agreeable companion, who had an abundant fund of good spirits, and who showed no sort of conscious embarrassment in thanking you with a bright look of her eyes or by a smile when you told her something that pleased or amused her.

But these flattering little speculations were doomed to receive a sudden check. The juvenile M. P. began to remark that a shade occasionally crossed the face of his fair companion; and that she sometimes looked a little anxiously across the table, where Mr. Lavender and Mrs. Lorraine were seated, half-hidden from view by a heap of silver and flowers in the middle of the board. But though they could not easily be seen, except at such moments as they turned to address some neighbour, they could be distinctly enough heard, when there was any lull in the general conversation. And what Sheila heard did not please her. She began to like that fair, clear-eyed young woman less. Perhaps her husband meant nothing by the fashion in which he talked of marriage, and the condition of a married man; but she would rather have not heard him talk so. Moreover, she was aware that, in the gentlest possible fashion, Mrs. Lorraine was making fun of her companion, and exposing him to small and graceful

shafts of ridicule; while he seemed, on the whole, to enjoy these attacks.

The ingenious self-love of Lord Arthur Redburn, M.P., was severely wounded by the notion that, after all, he had been made a cat's-paw of by a jealous wife. He had been flattered by this girl's exceeding friendliness; he had given her credit for a genuine impulsiveness which seemed to him as pleasing as it was uncommon; and he had, with the moderation expected of a man in politics, who hoped some day to assist in the government of the nation by accepting a Junior Lordship, admired her. But was it all pretence? Was she paying court to him merely to annoy her husband? Had her enthusiasm about the shooting of red deer been prompted by a wish to attract a certain pair of eyes at the other side of the table? Lord Arthur began to sneer at himself for having been duped. He ought to have known. Women were as much women in a Hebridean island as in Bayswater. He began to treat Sheila with a little more coolness; while she became more and more preoccupied with the couple across the table, and sometimes was innocently rude in answering his questions somewhat at random.

When the ladies were going into the drawing-room, Mrs. Lorraine put her hand within Sheila's arm, and led her to the entrance of the conservatory.

"I hope we shall be friends," she said.

"I hope so," said Sheila, not very warmly.

"Until you get better acquainted with your husband's friends, you will feel rather lonely at being left as at present, I suppose."

"A little," said Sheila.

"It is a silly thing, altogether. If men smoked

after dinner, I could understand it. But they merely sit, looking at wine they don't drink, talking a few commonplaces, and yawning."

"Why do they do it, then," said Sheila.

"They don't do it everywhere. But here we keep to the manners and customs of the ancients."

"What do you know about the manners of the ancients?" said Mrs. Kavanagh, tapping her daughter's shoulder, as she passed with a sheet of music.

"I have studied them frequently, mamma," said the daughter with composure,—"in the monkey-house at the Zoological Gardens."

The mamma smiled and passed on to place the music on the piano. Sheila did not understand what her companion had said; and, indeed, Mrs. Lorraine immediately turned, with the same calm, fine face, and careless eyes, to ask Sheila whether she would not, by and by, sing one of those northern songs of which Mr. Lavender had told her.

A tall girl, with her back-hair tied in a knot and her costume copied from a well-known pre-Raphaelite drawing, sat down to the piano, and sang a mystic song of the present day, in which the moon, the stars, and other natural objects behaved strangely, and were somehow mixed up with the appeal of a maiden who demanded that her dead lover should be reclaimed from the sea.

"Do you ever go down to your husband's studio?" said Mrs. Lorraine.

Sheila glanced towards the lady at the piano.

"Oh, you may talk," said Mrs. Lorraine, with the least expression of contempt in the grey eyes. "She is singing to gratify herself, not us."

"Yes, I sometimes go down," said Sheila, in as

low a voice as she could manage without falling into a whisper; "and it is such a dismal place. It is very hard on him to have to work in a big bare room like that, with the windows half-blinded. But sometimes I think Frank would rather have me out of the way."

"And what would he do, if both of us were to pay him a visit?" said Mrs. Lorraine. "I should like to see the studio. Won't you call for me some day and take me with you?"

Take her with her, indeed! Sheila began to wonder that she did not propose to go alone. Fortunately, there was no need to answer the question; for at this moment the song came to an end, and there was a general movement and murmur of gratitude.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Lorraine, to the lady who had sung, and who was now returning to the photographs she had left. "Thank you very much. I knew some one would instantly ask you to sing that song—it is the most charming of all your songs, I think, and how well it suits your voice, too!"

Then she turned to Sheila again.

"How did you like Lord Arthur Redburn?"

"I think he is a very good young man."

"Young men are never good; but they may be amiable," said Mrs. Lorraine, not perceiving that Sheila had blundered on a wrong adjective, and that she had really meant that she thought him honest and pleasant.

"You did not speak at all, I think, to your neighbour on the right; that was wise of you. He is a most insufferable person, but mamma bears with him for the sake of his daughter, who sang just now. He is *too* rich. And he smiles blandly, and takes a sort of

after-dinner view of things, as if he coincided with the arrangements of Providence. Don't you take coffee? Tea, then. I have met your aunt—I mean Mr. Lavender's aunt—such a dear old lady she is!"

"I don't like her," said Sheila.

"Oh, don't you, really?"

"Not at present; but I shall try to like her."

"Well," said Mrs. Lorraine, calmly, "you know she has her peculiarities. I wish she wouldn't talk so much about Marcus Aurelius and doses of medicine. I fancy I smell calomel when she comes near. I suppose if she were in a pantomime, they'd dress her up as a phial, tie a string round her neck, and label her 'POISON.' Dear me, how languid one gets in this climate. Let us sit down. I wish I was as strong as mamma."

They sat down together, and Mrs. Lorraine evidently expected to be petted and made much of by her new companion. She gave herself pretty little airs and graces, and said no more cutting things about anybody. And Sheila somehow found herself being drawn to the girl, so that she could scarcely help taking her hand, and saying how sorry she was to see her so pale, and fine, and delicate. The hand, too, was so small that the tiny white fingers seemed scarcely bigger than the claws of a bird. Was not that slender waist, to which some little attention was called by a belt of bold blue, just a little too slender for health, although the bust and shoulders were exquisitely and finely proportioned?

"We were at the Academy all the morning, and mamma is not a bit tired. Why has not Mr. Lavender anything in the Academy? Oh, I forgot," she added with a smile; "of course he has been very much en-

gaged. But now, I suppose, he will settle down to work."

Sheila wished that this fragile-looking girl would not so continually refer to her husband; but how was anyone to find fault with her, when she put a little air of plaintiveness into the ordinarily cold grey eyes, and looked at her small hand, as much as to say, "The fingers there are very small, and even whiter than the glove that covers them. They are the fingers of a child, who ought to be petted."

Then the men came in from the dining-room. Lavender looked round to see where Sheila was—perhaps with a trifle of disappointment that she was not the most prominent figure there. Had he expected to find all the women surrounding her and admiring her, and all the men going up to pay court to her? Sheila was seated near a small table, and Mrs. Lorraine was showing her something. She was just like anybody else. If she was a wonderful Sea-Princess who had come into a new world, no one seemed to observe her. The only thing that distinguished her from the women around her was her freshness of colour and the unusual combination of black eyelashes and dark blue eyes. Lavender had arranged that Sheila's first appearance in public should be at a very quiet little dinner-party; but even here she failed to create any profound impression. She was, as he had to confess to himself again, just like anybody else.

He went over to where Mrs. Lorraine was, and sat down beside her. Sheila, remembering his injunctions, felt bound to leave him there; and as she rose to speak to Mrs. Kavanagh, who was standing by, that lady came and begged her to sing a Highland song. By this time, Lavender had succeeded in interesting

his companion about something or other; and neither of them noticed that Sheila had gone to the piano, attended by the young politician who had taken her in to dinner. Nor did they interrupt their talk merely because someone played a few bars of prelude. But what was this that suddenly startled Lavender to the heart, causing him to look up with surprise? He had not heard the air since he was in Borva, and when Sheila sang

"Hark! hark, the horn
On mountain breezes borne!
Awake, it is morn;
Awake, Monaltrie!"

all sorts of reminiscences came rushing in upon him. How often had he heard that wild story of Monaltrie's flight sung in the small chamber over the sea, with a sound of the waves outside, and a scent of sea-weed coming in at the door and the windows! It was from the shores of Borva that young Monaltrie must have fled. It must have been in Borva that his sweetheart sat in her bower and sang, the burden of all her singing being "Return, Monaltrie!" And then as Sheila sang now, making the monotonous and plaintive air wild and strange—

"What cries of wild despair
Awake the sultry air?
Frenzied with anxious care,
She seeks Monaltrie!"

he heard no more of the song. He was thinking of bygone days in Borva, and of old Mackenzie living in his lonely house there. When Sheila had finished singing, he looked at her, and it seemed to him that she was still that wonderful Princess whom he had wooed on the shores of the Atlantic. And if those people did not see her as he saw her, ought he to be disappointed because of their blindness?

But if they saw nothing mystic or wonderful about Sheila, they at all events were considerably surprised by the strange sort of music she sang. It was not of a sort commonly heard in a London drawing-room. The pathos of its minor chords, its abrupt intervals, startling and wild in their effect, and the slowly subsiding wail in which it closed, did not much resemble the ordinary drawing-room "piece." Here, at least, Sheila had produced an impression; and presently there was a heap of people round the piano, expressing their admiration, asking questions, and begging her to continue. But she rose. She would rather not sing just then. Whereupon Lavender came out to her, and said—

"Sheila, won't you sing that wild one about the farewell—that has the sound of the pipes in it, you know?"

"Oh, yes," she said, directly.

Lavender went back to his companion.

"She is very obedient to you," said Mrs. Lorraine, with a smile.

"She is a very good girl," he said.

"Oh! soft be thy slumbers, by Tigh-na-linne's waters;
Thy late-wake was sung by Macdiarmid's fair daughters;
But far in Lochaber the true heart was weeping
Whose hopes are entombed in the grave where thou'rt sleeping."

—so Sheila sang; and it seemed to the people that this ballad was even more strange than its predecessor. When the song was over, Sheila seemed rather anxious to get out of the crowd, and indeed, walked away into the conservatory to have a look at the flowers.

Yes, Lavender had to confess to himself, Sheila was just like anybody else in this drawing-room. His Sea-Princess had produced no startling impression. He forgot that he had just been teaching her the ne-

cessity of observing the ways and customs of the people around her, so that she might avoid singularity.

On one point, at least, she was resolved she would attend to his counsels—she would not make him ridiculous by any show of affection before the eyes of strangers. She did not go near him the whole evening. She remained for the most part in that half-conservatory, half ante-room at the end of the drawing-room; and when anyone talked to her she answered, and when she was left alone she turned to the flowers. All this time, however, she could observe that Lavender and Mrs. Lorraine were very much engrossed in their conversation; that she seemed very much amused, and he at times a trifle embarrassed; and that both of them had apparently forgotten her existence. Mrs. Kavanagh was continually coming to Sheila, and trying to coax her back into the larger room; but in vain. She would rather not sing any more that night. She liked to look at flowers. She was not tired at all; and she had already seen those wonderful photographs about which everybody was talking.

"Well, Sheila, how did you enjoy yourself?" said her husband, as they were driving home.

"I wish Mr. Ingram had been there," said Sheila.

"Ingram! he would not have stopped in the place five minutes, unless he could play the part of Diogenes, and say rude things to everybody all round. Were you at all dull?"

"A little."

"Didn't somebody look after you?"

"Oh yes, many persons were very kind. But—but——"

"Well?"

"Nobody seemed to be better off than myself.

They all seemed to be wanting something to do; and I am sure they were all very glad to come away."

"No, no, no, Sheila. That is only your fancy. You were not much interested, that is evident; but you will get on better when you know more of the people. You were a stranger—that is what disappointed you; but you will not always be a stranger."

Sheila did not answer. Perhaps she contemplated with no great hope or longing the possibility of her coming to like such a method of getting through an evening. At all events, she looked forward with no great pleasure to the chance of her having to become friends with Mrs. Lorraine. All the way home, Sheila was examining her own heart, to try to discover why such bitter feelings should be there. Surely that American girl was honest: there was honesty in her grey eyes. She had been most kind to Sheila herself. And was there not at times—when she abandoned the ways and speech of a woman of the world—a singular coy fascination about her, that any man might be excused for yielding to, even as any woman might yield to it? Sheila fought with herself; and resolved that she would cast forth from her heart those harsh fancies and indignant feelings that seemed to have established themselves there. She would *not* hate Mrs. Lorraine.

As for Lavender, what was he thinking of, now that he and his young wife were driving home from their first experiment in society? He had to confess to a certain sense of failure. His dreams had not been realized. Everyone who had spoken to him had conveyed to him, as freely as good manners would admit, their congratulations, and their praises of his wife. But the impressive scenes he had been forecast-

ing were out of the question. There was a little curiosity about her, on the part of those who knew her story; and that was all. Sheila bore herself very well. She made no blunders. She had a good presence; she sang well; and everyone could see that she was handsome, gentle, and honest. Surely, he argued with himself, that ought to content the most exacting. But, in spite of all argument, he was not quite satisfied. He did not regret that he had sacrificed his liberty in a freak of romance; he did not even regard the fact of a man in his position having dared to marry a penniless girl as anything very meritorious or heroic; but he had hoped that the dramatic circumstances of the case would be duly recognized by his friends, and that Sheila would be an object of interest, and wonder, and talk in an whole series of social circles. The result of his adventure, he now saw, was different. There was only one married man the more in London: and London was not disposed to pay any particular heed to the circumstance.

CHAPTER XIII.

By the Waters of Babylon.

If Frank Lavender had been told that his love for his wife was in danger of waning, he would have laughed the suggestion to scorn. He was as fond of her and as proud of her as ever. Who knew as well as himself the tenderness of her heart, the proud sensitiveness of her conscience, the generosity of self-sacrifice she was always ready to bestow; and was he likely to become blind, so that he should fail to see how fair, and fearless, and handsome she was? Nothing was too good for her. He was recklessly extravagant

in buying her jewellery, dresses, and what not; and she was abundantly grateful. Nor had he relinquished those wild dreams of future renown which was to be consecrated all to her. He would make the name and the fame of Sheila known to all the world, not for his own sake, but that she might be pleased. He had been disappointed, it is true, in his fancies about the impression she would produce on his friends; but what a trifle was that! The folly of those fancies was his own. For the rest, he was glad that Sheila was not so different from the other women whom he knew. He hit upon the profound reflection, as he sat alone in his studio, that a man's wife, like his costume, should not be so remarkable as to attract attention. The perfection of dress was that you should be unconscious of its presence: might that not be so with marriage? After all, it was better that he had not bound himself to lug about a lion whenever he visited people's houses.

Still, there was something. He found himself a good deal alone. Sheila did not seem to care much for going into society; and although he did not greatly like the notion of going by himself, nevertheless one had certain duties towards one's friends to perform. She did not even care to go down to the Park of a forenoon. She always professed her readiness to go; but he fancied it was a trifle tiresome for her; and so, when there was nothing particular going on in the studio, he would walk down through Kensington Gardens himself, and have a chat with some friends, followed generally by luncheon with this or the other party of them. Sheila had been taught that she ought *not to* come so frequently to that studio. Bras would *not lie quiet.* Moreover, if dealers or other strangers

should come in, would they not take her for a model? So Sheila stayed at home; and Mr. Lavender, after having dressed with care in the morning— with very singular care, indeed, considering that he was going to his work—used to go down to his studio to smoke a cigarette. The chances were that he was not in a humour for working. Those dreams of a great renown which he was to win for Sheila's sake were too vast, remote, and impalpable to be fastened down to any square bit of canvas. He would sit down in an easy-chair, and kick his heels on the floor for a time, watching perhaps the sunlight come in through the upper part of the windows and paint yellow squares on the opposite wall. Then he would go out and lock the door behind him; leaving no message whatever for those crowds of importunate dealers who, as Sheila fancied, were besieging him with offers in one hand and purses of gold in the other.

One morning, after she had been in-doors for two or three days, and had grown hopelessly tired of the monotony of watching that sunlit square, she was filled with an unconquerable longing to go away, for however brief a space, from the sight of houses. The morning was sweet, and clear, and bright; white clouds were slowly crossing a fair blue sky; and a fresh and cool breeze was blowing in at the open French windows.

"Bras," she said, going down stairs, and out into the small garden, "we are going into the country."

The great deerhound seemed to know; and rose and came to her with great gravity, while she clasped on the leash. He was no frisky animal to show his delight by yelping and gambolling; but he laid his long nose *in her hand*, and slowly wagged the down-

drooping curve of his shaggy tail; and then he placidly walked by her side up into the hall, where he stood awaiting her.

She would go along and beg of her husband to leave his work for a day, and go with her for a walk down to Richmond Park. She had often heard Mr. Ingram speak of walking down; and she remembered that much of the road was pretty. Why should not her husband have one holiday?

"It is such a shame," she had said to him that morning, as he left, "that you will be going into that gloomy place, with its bare walls and chairs, and the windows so that you cannot see out of them."

"I must get some work done somehow, Sheila," he said; although he did not tell her that he had not finished a picture since his marriage.

"I wish I could do some of it for you," she said.

"You! All the work you're good for is catching fish, and feeding ducks, and hauling up sails. Why don't you come down and feed the ducks in the Serpentine?"

"I should like to do that," she answered. "I will go any day with you."

"Well," he said, "you see, I don't know until I get along to the studio whether I can get away for the forenoon; and then, if I were to come back here, you would have little or no time to dress. Good-bye, Sheila."

"Good-bye," she had said to him, giving up the Serpentine without much regret.

But the forenoon had turned out so delightful that she thought she would go along to the studio, and hale him out of that gaunt and dingy apartment. She should take him away from town; therefore she might

put on that rough blue dress in which she used to go boating in Loch Roag. She had lately smartened it up a bit with some white braid; and she hoped he would approve.

Did the big hound know the dress? He rubbed his head against her arm and hand when she came down; and looked up, and whined almost inaudibly.

"You are going out, Bras; and you must be a good dog, and not try to go after the deer. Then I will send a very good story of you to Mairi; and when she comes to London, after the harvest is over, she will bring you a present from the Lewis, and you will be very proud."

She went out into the square, and was perhaps a little glad to get away from it, as she was not sure of the blue dress and the small hat with its sea-gull's feather being precisely the costume she ought to wear. When she got into the Uxbridge Road, she breathed more freely; and in the lightness of her heart she continued her conversation with Bras, giving that attentive animal a vast amount of information, partly in English, partly in Gaelic, which he only answered by a low whine or a shake of his shaggy head.

But these confidences were suddenly interrupted. She had got down to Addison Terrace, and was contentedly looking at the trees and chatting to the dog, when by accident her eye happened to light on a brougham that was driving past. In it—she beheld them both clearly for a brief second—were her husband and Mrs. Lorraine, engaged in conversation, so that neither of them saw her. Sheila stood on the pavement for a couple of minutes, absolutely bewildered. All sorts of wild fancies and recollections

came crowding in upon her—reasons why her husband was unwilling that she should visit his studio—why Mrs. Lorraine never called on her—and so forth, and so forth. She did not know what to think for a time; but presently all this tumult was stilled, and she had bravely resolved her doubts and made up her mind as to what she should do. She could not suspect her husband—that was the one sweet security to which she clung. He had made use of no duplicity; if there was anything wrong—and perhaps she committed a great injustice in even imagining such a possibility—he, at least, was certainly not in fault. And if this Mrs. Lorraine should amuse him and interest him, who could grudge him this break in the monotony of his work? Sheila knew that she herself disliked going to those fashionable gatherings to which Mrs. Lorraine went, and to which Lavender had been accustomed to go before he was married. How could she expect him to give up all his old habits and pleasures for her sake? She would be more reasonable and more generous. It was her own fault that she was not a better companion for him; and was it for her, then, to think hardly of him because he went to the Park with a friend instead of going alone?

Yet there was a great bitterness and grief in her heart as she turned and walked on. She spoke no more to the deerhound by her side. There seemed to be less sunlight in the air; and the people and carriages passing were hardly so busy and cheerful and interesting as they had been. But all the same, she would go to Richmond Park, and by herself: for what was the use of calling in at the studio; and how could she go back home and sit in the house, knowing that her husband was away at some flower-show, or morn-

ing concert, or some such thing, with that young American lady?

She knew no other road to Richmond than that by which they had driven shortly after her arrival in London; and so it was that she went down and over Hammersmith Bridge, and round by Mortlake, and so on by East Sheen. The road seemed terribly long. She was an excellent walker, and, in ordinary circumstances, would have done the distance without fatigue; but when at length she saw the gates of the Park before her, she was at once exceedingly tired, and almost faint from hunger. Here was the hotel in which they had dined; should she enter? The place seemed very grand and forbidding: she had scarcely even looked at it as she went up the steps with her husband by her side. However, she would venture; and accordingly she went up and into the vestibule, looking rather timidly about. A young gentleman, apparently not a waiter, approached her, and seemed to wait for her to speak. It was a terrible moment. What was she to ask for, and could she ask it of this young man? Fortunately he spoke first, and asked her if she wished to go into the coffee-room, and if she expected anyone.

"No, I do not expect anyone," she said, and she knew that he would perceive the peculiarity of her accent; "but if you will be kind enough to tell me where I may have a biscuit——"

It occurred to her that to go into the Star and Garter for a biscuit was absurd; and she added, wildly—

"——or anything to eat."

The young man obviously regarded her with some surprise: but he was very courteous, and showed her into the coffee-room, and called a waiter to her.

Moreover, he gave permission for Bras to be admitted into the room, Sheila promising that he would lie under the table and not budge an inch. Then she looked round. There were only three persons in the room; one an old lady seated by herself in a far corner, the other two being a couple of young folks too much engrossed with each other to mind anyone else. She began to feel more at home. The waiter suggested various things for lunch; and she made her choice of something cold. Then she mustered up courage to ask for a glass of sherry. How she would have enjoyed all this as a story to tell to her husband but for that incident of the morning! She would have gloried in her outward bravery; and made him smile with a description of her inward terror. She would have written about it to the old King of Borva, and bid him consider how she had been transformed, and what strange scenes Bras was now witnessing. But all that was over. She felt as if she could no longer ask her husband to be amused by her childish experiences; and as for writing to her father, she dared not write to him in her present mood. Perhaps some happier time would come. Sheila paid her bill. She had heard her husband and Mr. Ingram talk about tipping waiters, and knew that she ought to give something to the man who had attended on her. But how much? He was a very august-looking person, with formally-cut whiskers, and a severe expression of face. When he had brought back the change to her she timidly selected a half-crown, and offered it to him. There was a little glance of surprise; she feared she had not given him enough. Then he said "Thank you!" in a vague and distant fashion, and she was sure she had not given him enough. But it was too late. Bras was

summoned from beneath the table; and again she went out into the fresh air.

"Oh, my good dog!" she said to him, as they together walked up to the gates and into the Park, "this is a very extravagant country. You have to pay half-a-crown to a servant for bringing you a piece of cold pie, and then he looks as if he was not paid enough. And Duncan, who will do everything about the house, and will give us all our dinners, it is only a pound a week he will get, and Scarlett has to be kept out of that. And wouldn't you like to see poor old Scarlett again?"

Bras whined as if he understood every word.

"I suppose now she is hanging out the washing on the gooseberry bushes, and you know the song she always used to sing then? Don't you know that Scarlett carried me about, long before you were born, for you are a mere infant compared with me, and she used to sing to me—

'Ged' bheirte mi' bho'n bhas so,
Mho Sheila bheag òg'!'

And that is what she is singing just now; and Mairi she is bringing the things out of the washing-house. Papa he is over in Stornoway this morning, arranging his accounts with the people there, and perhaps he is down at the quay, looking at the *Clansman*, and wondering when she is to bring me into the harbour. Ah—h! You bad dog."

Bras had forgotten to listen to his mistress in the excitement of seeing in the distance a large herd of deer under certain trees. She felt by the leash that he was trembling in every limb with expectation, and straining hard on the collar. Again and again she admonished him—in vain; until she had at last to drag him away down the hill, putting a small plantation

between him and the herd. Here she found a large, umbrageous chestnut-tree, with a wooden seat round its trunk, and so she sat down in the green twilight of the leaves, while Bras came and put his head in her lap. Out beyond the shadow of the tree all the world lay bathed in sunlight; and a great silence brooded over the long undulations of the Park, where not a human being was in sight. How strange it was, she fell to thinking, that within a short distance there were millions of men and women, while here she was absolutely alone. Did they not care, then, for the sunlight, and the trees, and the sweet air? Were they so wrapped up in those social observances that seemed to her so barren of interest?

"They have a beautiful country here," she said, talking in a rambling and wistful way to Bras, and scarcely noticing the eager light in his eyes, as if he were trying to understand. "They have no rain, and no fog; almost always blue skies, and the clouds high up and far away. And the beautiful trees they have too—you never saw anything like that in the Lewis—not even at Stornoway. And the people are so rich, and beautiful in their dress, and all the day they have only to think how to enjoy themselves, and what new amusement is for the morrow. But I think they are tired of having nothing to do—or perhaps, you know, they are tired because they have nothing to fight against—no hard weather, and hunger, and poverty. They do not care for each other as they would if they were working on the same farm, and trying to save up for the winter; or if they were going out to the fishing, and very glad to come home again from Caithness to find all the old people very well, and the young ones ready for a dance, and a dram, and much joking and

laughing and telling of stories. It is a very great difference there will be in the people—very great."

She rose, and looked wistfully around her, and then turned with a sigh to make her way to the gates. It was with no especial sort of gladness that she thought of returning home. Here, in the great stillness, she had been able to dream of the far island which she knew, and to fancy herself for a few minutes there; now she was going back to the dreary monotony of her life in that square, and to the doubts and anxieties which had been suggested to her in the morning. The world she was about to enter once more seemed so much less homely, so much less full of interest and purpose, than that other and distant world she had been wistfully regarding for a time. The people around her had neither the joys nor the sorrows with which she had been taught to sympathise. Their cares seemed to her to be exaggerations of trifles; she could feel no pity for them, their satisfaction was derived from sources unintelligible to her. And the social atmosphere around her seemed still, and close, and suffocating; so that she was like to cry out at times for one breath of God's clear wind—for a shaft of lightning even—to cut through the sultry and drowsy sameness of her life.

She had almost forgotten the dog by her side. While sitting under the chestnut she had carelessly and loosely wound the leash round his neck, in the semblance of a collar; and when she rose and came away, she let the dog walk by her side without undoing the leash and taking proper charge of him. She was thinking of far other things, indeed, when she was startled by some one calling her—

"Look out, Miss, or you'll have your dog shot!"

She turned, and caught a glimpse of that which sent a thrill of terror to her heart. Bras had sneaked off from her side—had trotted lightly over the breckans, and was now in full chase of a herd of deer which were flying down the slope on the other side of the plantation. He rushed now at one, now at another; the very number of chances presented to him proving the safety of the whole herd. But as Sheila, with a swift flight that would have astonished most town-bred girls, followed the wild chase and came to the crest of the slope, she could see that the hound had at length singled out a particular deer—a fine buck with handsome horns, that was making straight for the foot of the valley. The herd, that had been much scattered, were now drawing together again, though checking nothing of their speed; but this single buck had been driven from his companions, and was doing his utmost to escape from the fangs of the powerful animal behind him.

What could she do but run wildly and breathlessly on? The dog was now far beyond the reach of her voice. She had no whistle. All sorts of fearful anticipations rushed in on her mind—the most prominent of all being the anger of her father if Bras were shot. How could she go back to Borva with such a tale; and how could she live in London without this companion who had come with her from the far north? Then what terrible things were connected with the killing of deer in a Royal Park? She remembered vaguely what Mr. Ingram and her husband had been saying; and while these things were crowding in upon her, she felt her strength beginning to fail, while both the dog and the deer had disappeared altogether from sight.

Strange, too, that in the midst of her fatigue and fright, while she still managed to struggle on, with a sharp pain at her heart and a sort of mist before her eyes, she had a vague consciousness that her husband would be vexed, not by the conduct or the fate of Bras, but by her being the heroine of so mad an adventure. She knew that he wished her to be serious, and subdued, and proper, like the ladies whom she met; while an evil destiny seemed to dog her footsteps and precipitate her into all sorts of erratic mishaps and "scenes." However, this adventure was likely soon to have an end.

She could go no further. Whatever had become of Bras, it was in vain for her to think of pursuing him. When she at length reached a broad and smooth road leading through the pasture, she could only stand still and press her two hands over her heart, while her head seemed giddy, and she did not see two men who had been standing on the road close by until they came up and addressed her.

Then she started, and looked round; finding before her two men who were apparently labourers of some sort, one of them having a shovel over his shoulder.

"Beg your pardon, Miss, but wur that your dawg?"

"Yes," she said, eagerly. "Could you get it? Did you see him go by? Do you know where he is?"

"Me and my mate saw him go by, sure enough; but as for getting him—why, the keepers 'll have shot him by this time."

"Oh no!" cried Sheila, almost in tears, "they must not shoot him. It was my fault. I will pay them for all the harm he has done. Can't you tell me which way he will go past?"

"I don't think, Miss," said the spokesman, quite

respectfully, "as you can go much furder. If you would sit down, and rest yourself, and keep an eye on this 'ere shovel, me and my mate will have a hunt arter the dawg."

Sheila not only accepted the offer gratefully, but promised to give them all the money she had if only they would bring back the dog unharmed. Then the men went their way.

It was a hard thing to wait here, in the greatest doubt and uncertainty, while the afternoon was visibly waning. She began to grow afraid. Perhaps the men had stolen the dog, and left her with this shovel as a blind. Her husband must have come home; and would be astonished and perplexed by her absence. Surely he would have the sense to dine by himself, instead of waiting for her; and she reflected with some glimpse of satisfaction, that she had left everything connected with dinner properly arranged, so that he should have nothing to grumble at.

Her reverie was interrupted by the sound of footsteps on the grass behind: and she turned quickly, to find the two men approaching her, one of them leading the captive Bras by the leash. Sheila sprang to her feet with a great gladness. She did not care even to accuse the culprit, whose consciousness of guilt was evident in his look and in the droop of his tail. Bras did not once turn his eyes to his mistress. He hung down his head, while he panted rapidly, and she fancied she saw some smearing of blood on his tongue and on the side of his jaw. Her fears on this head were speedily confirmed.

"I think, Miss, as you'd better take him out o' the Park as soon as maybee; for he's got a deer killed close by the Robin Hood Gate, in the trees there, and

if the keepers happen on it afore you leave the Park, you'll get into trouble."

"Oh, thank you," said Sheila, retaining her composure bravely, but with a terrible sinking of the heart; "and how can I get to the nearest railway station?"

"You're going to London, Miss?"

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose the nearest is Richmond; but it would be quieter for you, don't you see, Miss, if you was to go along to the Roehampton Gate and go to Barnes."

"Will you show me the gate?" said Sheila, choosing the quieter route at once.

But the men themselves did not at all like the look of accompanying her and this dog through the Park. Had they not already condoned a felony, or done something equally dreadful, in handing to her a dog that had been found keeping watch and ward over a slain buck? They showed her the road to the Roehampton Gate; and then they paused before continuing on their journey.

The pause meant money. Sheila took out her purse. There were three sovereigns and some silver in it; and the entire sum, in fulfilment of her promise, she held out to him who had so far conducted the negotiations.

Both men looked frightened. It was quite clear that either good feeling or some indefinite fear of being implicated in the killing of the deer caused them to regard this big bribe as something they could not meddle with; and at length, after a pause of a second or two, the spokesman said, with great hesitation—

"Well, Miss, you've kep' your word; but me and my

mate—well, if so be as it's the same to you, 'd rather have summut to drink your health——"

"Do you think it is too much?"

The man looked at his neighbour, who nodded.

"It was only for ketchin' of a dawg, Miss, don't you see?" he remarked, slowly, as if to impress upon her that they had nothing whatever to do with the deer.

"Will you take this, then?" and she offered them half-a-crown each.

Their faces lightened considerably; they took the money; and, with a formal expression of thanks, moved off—but not before they had taken a glance round to see that no one had been a witness of this interview.

And so Sheila had to walk away by herself, knowing that she had been guilty of a dreadful offence, and that at any moment she might be arrested by the officers of the law. What would the old King of Borva say if he saw his only daughter in the hands of two policemen; and would not all Mr. Lavender's fastidious and talkative and wondering friends pass about the newspaper report of her trial and conviction! A man was approaching her. As he drew near her heart failed her; for might not this be the mysterious George Ranger himself, about whom her husband and Mr. Ingram had been talking? Should she drop on her knees at once, and confess her sins, and beg him to let her off? If Duncan were with her, or Mairi, or even old Scarlett Macdonald, she would not have cared so much: but it seemed so terrible to meet this man alone.

However, as he drew near he did not seem a fierce person. He was an old gentleman, with voluminous white hair, who was dressed all in black, and carried

an umbrella on this warm and bright afternoon. He regarded her and the dog in a distant and contemplative fashion, as though he would probably try to remember them some time after he had really seen them; and then he passed on. Sheila began to breathe more freely. Moreover, here was the gate; and once she was in the high road, who could say anything to her? Tired as she was, she still walked rapidly on; and in due time, having had to ask the way once or twice, she found herself at Barnes station.

By and by the train came in; Bras was committed to the care of the guard; and she found herself alone in a railway carriage, for the first time in her life. Her husband had told her that whenever she felt uncertain of her whereabouts, if in the country, she was to ask for the nearest station and get a train to London; if in town, she was to get into a cab and give the driver her address. And, indeed, Sheila had been so much agitated and perplexed during this afternoon, that she acted in a sort of mechanical fashion, and really escaped the nervousness which otherwise would have attended the novel experience of purchasing a ticket and of arranging about the carriage of a dog in the break-van. Even now, when she found herself travelling alone, and shortly to arrive at a part of London she had never seen, her crowding thoughts and fancies were not about her own situation, but about the reception she should receive from her husband. Would he be vexed with her? Or pity her? Had he called, with Mrs. Lorraine, to take her somewhere, and found her gone? Had he brought home some bachelor friends to dinner, and been chagrined to find her not in the house?

It was getting dusk when the slow four-wheeler

approached Sheila's home. The hour for dinner had long gone by. Perhaps her husband had gone away somewhere looking for her, and she would find the house empty.

But Frank Lavender came to meet his wife in the hall, and said—

"Where have you been?"

She could not tell whether there was anger or kindness in his voice; and she could not well see his face. She took his hand, and went into the dining-room, which was also in dusk, and, standing there, told him all her story.

"By Jove!" he said, impatiently. "I'll go and thrash that dog within an inch of its life."

"No," she said, drawing herself up; and for one brief second—could he but have seen her face—there was a touch of old Mackenzie's pride and firmness about the ordinarily gentle lips. It was but for a second. She cast down her eyes, and said, meekly, "I hope you won't do that, Frank. The dog is not to blame. It was my fault."

"Well, really, Sheila," he said, "don't you think you are a little thoughtless? I wish you would try to act as other women act, instead of constantly putting yourself and me into the most awkward positions. Suppose I had brought anyone home to dinner, now? And what am I to say to Ingram?—for of course I went direct to his lodgings when I discovered you were nowhere to be found. I fancied some mad freak had taken you there; and I should not have been surprised. Do you know who was in the hall when I came in this afternoon?"

"No," said Sheila.

"Why, that wretched old hag who keeps the fruit-

stall. And it seems you gave her and all her family tea and cake in the kitchen last night."

It was certainly not the expense of these charities that he objected to. He was himself recklessly generous in such things. He would have given a sovereign where Sheila gave a shilling; but that was a different matter from having his wife almost associate with such people.

"She is a poor old woman," said Sheila, humbly.

"A poor old woman!" he said. "I have no doubt she is a lying old thief, who would take an umbrella or a coat if only she could get the chance. It is really too bad, Sheila, your having all those persons about me, and demeaning yourself by attending on them. What must the servants think of you!"

"I do not heed what any servants think of me," she said.

She was now standing erect, with her face quite calm.

"Apparently not!" he said, "or you would not go and make yourself ridiculous before them."

Sheila hesitated for a moment, as if she did not understand; and then she said, as calmly as before, but with a touch of indignation about the proud and beautiful lips—

"And if I make myself ridiculous by attending to poor people, it is not my husband who should tell me so."

She turned and walked out, and he was too surprised to follow her. She went upstairs to her own room, locked herself in, and threw herself on the bed. And then all the bitterness of her heart rose up as if in a flood—not against him, but against the country in which he lived, and the society which had contaminated him, and the ways and habits that seemed to create a barrier between *herself and him, so* that she was almost a stranger

to him, and incapable of becoming anything else. It was a fault that she should interest herself in the unfortunate creatures round about her; that she should talk to them as if they were human beings like herself, and have a great sympathy with their small hopes and aims: but she would not have been led into such a fault if she had cultivated from her infancy upwards a consistent self-indulgence, making herself the centre of a world of mean desires and petty gratifications. And then she thought of the old and beautiful days up in the Lewis, where the young English stranger seemed to approve of her simple ways and her charitable work; and where she was taught to believe that, in order to please him, she had only to continue to be what she was then. There was no great gulf of time between that period and this; but what had not happened in the interval! She had not changed—at least she hoped she had not changed. She loved her husband with her whole heart and soul; her devotion was as true and constant as she herself could have wished it to be when she dreamed of the duties of a wife in the days of her maidenhood. But all around her was changed. She had no longer the old freedom—the old delight in living from day to day—the active work, and the enjoyment of seeing where she could help, and how she could help, the people around her. When, as if by the same sort of instinct that makes a wild animal retain in captivity the habits which were necessary to its existence when it lived in freedom, she began to find out the circumstances of such unfortunate people as were in her neighbourhood, some little solace was given to her; but these people were not friends to her, as the poor folk of Borvabost had been. She knew, too, that her husband would be displeased if he

found her talking with a washerwoman over the poor creature's family matters, or even advising one of her own servants about the disposal of her wages; so that, while she concealed nothing from him, these things nevertheless had to be done exclusively in his absence. And was she, in so doing, really making herself ridiculous? Did he consider her ridiculous? Or was it not merely the fatal influences of the indolent society in which he lived that had poisoned his mind, and drawn him away from her as though into another world?

Alas! if he were in that other world, was not she quite alone? What companionship was there possible between her and the people in this new and strange land into which she had ventured? As she lay on the bed, with her head hidden down in the darkness, the pathetic wail of the captive Jews seemed to come and go through the bitterness of her thoughts, like some mournful refrain: "*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.*" She almost heard the words; and the reply that rose up to her heart was a great yearning to go back to her own land, so that her eyes were filled with tears, in thinking of it, and she lay and sobbed there, in the dusk. Would not the old man, living all by himself in that lonely island, be glad to see his little girl back again in the old house? and she would sing to him as she used to sing, not as she had been singing to those people whom her husband knew. "*For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.*" And she had sung in the strange land, among the strange people, with her heart breaking with thoughts of the sea, and the hills, and

the rude and sweet and simple ways of the old bygone life she had left behind her.

"Sheila!"

She thought it was her father calling to her, and she rose with a cry of joy. For one wild moment she fancied that outside were all the people she knew—Duncan, and Scarlett, and Mairi—and that she was once more at home, with the sea all around her, and the salt, cold air.

"Sheila, I want to speak to you."

It was her husband. She went to the door, opened it, and stood there, penitent and with downcast face.

"Come, you must not be silly," he said, with some kindness in his voice. "You have had no dinner. You must be hungry."

"I do not care for any—there is no use troubling the servants when I would rather lie down," she said.

"The servants! You surely don't take so seriously what I said about them, Sheila? Of course, you don't need to care what the servants think. And in any case they have to bring up dinner for me, so you may as well come and try."

"Have you not had dinner?" she said, timidly.

"Do you think I could sit down and eat with a notion that you might have tumbled into the Thames, or been kidnapped, or something?"

"I am very sorry," she said, in a low voice; and in the gloom he felt his hand taken and carried to her lips. Then they went down-stairs into the dining-room, which was now lit up by a blaze of gas and candles.

During dinner, of course, no very confidential talking was possible; and, indeed, Sheila had plenty to tell of her adventures at Richmond. Lavender was now in a more amiable mood; and was disposed to look upon

the killing of the roebuck as rather a good joke. He complimented Sheila on her good sense in having gone in to the Star and Garter for lunch; and altogether something like better relations was established between them.

But when dinner was finally over, and the servants dismissed, Lavender placed Sheila's easy chair for her as usual, drew his own near hers, and lit a cigarette.

"Now, tell me, Sheila," he said, "were you really vexed with me when you went up-stairs and locked yourself in your room? Did you think I meant to displease you, or say anything harsh to you?"

"No, not any of those things," she said, calmly; "I wished to be alone—to think over what had happened. And I was grieved by what you said; for I think you cannot help looking at many things not as I will look at them—that is all. It is my bringing up in the Highlands, perhaps."

"Do you know, Sheila, it sometimes occurs to me that you are not quite comfortable here; and I can't make out what is the matter! I think you have a perverse fancy that you are different from the people you meet, and that you cannot be like them, and all that sort of thing. Now, dear, that is only a fancy. There need be no difference, if only you will take a little trouble."

"Oh, Frank!" she said, going over and putting her hand on his shoulder, "I cannot take that trouble! I cannot try to be like those people. And I see a great difference in you since you have come back to London, and you are getting to be like them, and say the things they say. If I could only see you, my own darling, up in the Lewis again, with rough clothes on, and a gun in your hand, I should be happy. You were yourself up there, when you were helping us in the boat, or when you were bringing home the salmon,

or when we were all together at night in the little parlour, you know——"

"My dear, don't get so excited. Now sit down, and I will tell you all about it. You seem to have the notion that people lose all their finer sentiments simply because they don't, in society, burst into raptures over them. You mustn't imagine all those people are selfish and callous merely because they preserve a decent reticence. To tell you the truth, that constant profession of noble feelings you would like to see would have something of ostentation about it."

Sheila only sighed.

"I do not wish them to be altered," she said, by and by, with her eyes grown pensive; "all I know is that I could not live the same life. And you—you seemed to be happier up in the Highlands than you have ever been since."

"Well, you see, a man ought to be happy when he is enjoying a holiday in the country, along with the girl he is engaged to. But if I had lived all my life killing salmon and shooting wild duck, I should have grown up an ignorant boor, with no more sense of——"

He stopped; for he saw that the girl was thinking of her father.

"Well, look here, Sheila. You see how you are placed—how we are placed, rather. Wouldn't it be more sensible to get to understand those people you look askance at, and establish better relations with them, since you have got to live among them? I can't help thinking you are too much alone, and you can't expect me to stay in the house always with you. A husband and wife cannot be continually in each other's company, unless they want to grow heartily tired of each other. Now if you would only lay aside those

suspicions of yours, you would find the people just as honest, and generous, and friendly as any other sort of people you ever met, although they don't happen to be fond of expressing their goodness in their talk."

"I have tried, dear—I will try again," said Sheila.

She resolved that she would go down and visit Mrs. Kavanagh next day, and try to be interested in the talk of such people as might be there. She would bring away some story about this or the other fashionable woman or noble lord, just to show her husband that she was doing her best to learn. She would drive patiently round the park in that close little brougham, and listen attentively to the moralities of Marcus Aurelius. She would make an appointment to go with Mrs. Lorraine to a morning concert. All these things, and many more, Sheila silently vowed to herself she would do, while her husband sat and expounded to her his theories of the obligations which society demanded of its members.

But her plans were suddenly broken asunder.

"I met Mrs. Lorraine accidentally to-day," he said.

It was his first mention of the young American lady. Sheila sat in mute expectation.

"She always asks very kindly after you."

"She is very good."

He did not say, however, that Mrs. Lorraine had more than once made distinct propositions, when in his company, that they should call in for Sheila, and take her out for a drive, or to a flower-show, or some such place, while Lavender had always some excuse ready.

"She is going to Brighton to-morrow, and she was wondering whether you would care to run down for a *day or two.*"

"With her?" said Sheila, recoiling from such a proposal instinctively.

"Of course not. I should go. And then at last, you know, you would see the sea, about which you have been dreaming for ever so long."

The sea! There was a magic in the very word that could almost at any moment summon tears into her eyes. Of course, she accepted right gladly. If her husband's duties were so pressing that the long-talked-of journey to Lewis and Borva had to be repeatedly and indefinitely postponed, here at least would be a chance of looking again at the sea—of drinking in the freshness and light and colour of it—of renewing her old and intimate friendship with it, that had been broken off for so long by her stay in this city of perpetual houses and still sunshine.

"You can tell her you will go when you see her to-night at Lady Mary's. By the way, isn't it time for you to begin to dress?"

"Oh, Lady Mary's," repeated Sheila, mechanically, who had forgotten all about her engagements for that evening.

"Perhaps you are too tired to go," said her husband.

She was a little tired, in truth. But surely, just after her promises, spoken and unspoken, some little effort was demanded of her; so she bravely went to dress, and in about three-quarters of an hour was ready to drive down to Curzon Street. Her husband had never seen her look so pleased before in going out to any party. He flattered himself that his lecture had done her good. There was fair common-sense in what he had said; and although, doubtless, a girl's romanticism was a pretty thing, it would have to yield to the actual requirements of life. In time he should educate Sheila.

But he did not know what brightened the girl's face all that night, and put a new life into the beautiful eyes, so that even those who knew her best were struck by her singular beauty. It was the sea that was colouring Sheila's eyes. The people around her, the glare of the candles, the hum of talking, and the motion of certain groups dancing over there in the middle of the throng—all were faint and visionary; for she was busily wondering what the sea would be like the next morning, and what strange fancies would strike her when once more she walked on sand, and heard the roar of waves. That, indeed, was the sound that was present in her ears, while the music played, and the people murmured around her. Mrs. Lorraine talked to her, and was surprised and amused to notice the eager fashion in which the girl spoke of their journey of the next day. The gentleman who took her in to supper found himself catechised about Brighton in a manner which afforded him more occupation than enjoyment. And when Sheila drove away from the house, at two in the morning, she declared to her husband that she had enjoyed herself extremely, and he was glad to hear it; and she was particularly kind to himself in getting him his slippers, and fetching him that final cigarette which he always had on reaching home; and then she went off to bed to dream of ships, and flying clouds, and cold winds, and a great and beautiful blue plain of waves.

CHAPTER XIV.

Deeper and Deeper.

NEXT morning Sheila was busy with her preparations for departure when she heard a hansom drive up.

She looked from the window, and saw Mr. Ingram step out; and, before he had time to cross the pavement, she had run round and opened the door, and stood at the top of the steps to receive him. How often had her husband cautioned her not to forget herself in this monstrous fashion!

"Did you think I had run away? Have you come to see me?" she said, with a bright, roseate gladness on her face which reminded him of many a pleasant morning in Borva.

"I did not think you had run away, for you see I have brought you some flowers," he said; but there was a sort of blush in the sallow face, and perhaps the girl had some quick fancy or suspicion that he had brought this bouquet to prove that he knew everything was right, and that he expected to see her. It was only a part of his universal kindness and thoughtfulness, she considered.

"Frank is upstairs," she said, "getting ready some things to go to Brighton. Will you come into the breakfast-room? Have you had breakfast?"

"Oh, you were going to Brighton."

"Yes," she said; and somehow something moved her to add, quickly, "but not for long, you know. Only a few days. It is many a time you will have told me of Brighton, long ago, in the Lewis; but I cannot understand a large town being beside the sea, and it will be a great surprise to me, I am sure of that."

"Ay, Sheila," he said, falling into the old habit quite naturally, "you will find it different from Borva-bost. You will have no scampering about the rocks, with your head bear, and your hair flying about. You will have to dress more correctly there than here even; and, by the way, you must be busy getting ready, so I will go."

"Oh no," she said, with a quick look of disappointment, "you will not go yet. If I had known you were coming—but it was very late when we will get home this morning—two o'clock it was."

"Another ball?"

"Yes," said the girl, but not very joyfully.

"Why, Sheila," he said, with a grave smile on his face, "you are becoming quite a woman of fashion now. And you know I can't keep up an acquaintance with a fine lady who goes to all these grand places, and knows all sorts of swell people; so you'll have to cut me, Sheila——"

"I hope I shall be dead before that time ever comes," said the girl, with a sudden flash of indignation in her eyes. Then she softened. "But it is not kind of you to laugh at me."

"Of course, I did not laugh at you," he said, taking both her hands in his, "although I used to sometimes when you were a little girl, and talked very wild English. Don't you remember how vexed you used to be; and how pleased you were when your papa turned the laugh against me by getting me to say that awful Gaelic sentence about '*A young calf ate a raw egg*'?"

"Can you say it now?" said Sheila, with her face getting bright and pleased again. "Try it after me. Now listen."

She uttered some half-dozen of the most extraordinary sounds that any language ever contained; but Ingram would not attempt to follow her. She reproached him with having forgotten all that he had learnt in Lewis; and said she should no longer look on him as a possible Highlander.

"But what are *you* now," he asked. "You are no longer that wild girl who used to run out to sea in the

Maighdean-mhara, whenever there was the excitement of a storm coming on."

"Many times," she said, slowly and wistfully. "I will wish that I could be that again, for a little while."

"Don't you enjoy, then, all those fine gatherings you go to?"

"I try to like them."

"And you don't succeed."

He was looking at her gravely and earnestly; and she turned away her head, and did not answer. At this moment Lavender came down stairs, and entered the room.

"Hillo, Ingram, my boy; glad to see you! What pretty flowers—it's a pity we can't take them to Brighton with us."

"But I intend to take them," said Sheila, firmly.

"Oh, very well, if you don't mind the bother," said her husband; "I should have thought your hands would have been full—you know, you'll have to take everything with you you would want in London. You will find that Brighton isn't a dirty little fishing-village in which you've only to tuck up your dress and run about anyhow."

"I never saw a dirty little fishing-village," said Sheila, quietly.

Her husband laughed.

"I meant no offence. I was not thinking of Borvabost at all. Well, Ingram, can't you run down and see us while we are at Brighton?"

"Oh do, Mr. Ingram!" said Sheila, with quite a new interest in her face, and she came forward as though she would have gone down on her knees, and begged this great favour of him.

"Do, Mr. Ingram! We should try to amuse you

some way; and the weather is sure to be fine. Shall we keep a room for you? Can you come on Friday and stay till the Monday? It is a great difference there will be in the place if you come down."

Ingram looked at Sheila, and was on the point of promising, when Lavender added—

"And we shall introduce you to that young American lady whom you are so anxious to meet."

"Oh, is she to be there?" he said, looking rather curiously at Lavender.

"Yes, she and her mother. We are going down together."

"Then I'll see whether I can, in a day or two," he said, but in a tone which pretty nearly convinced Sheila that she should not have her stay at Brighton made pleasant by the company of her old friend and associate.

However, the mere anticipation of seeing the sea was much; and when they had got into a cab and were going down to Victoria Station Sheila's eyes were filled with a joyful anticipation. She had discarded altogether the descriptions of Brighton that had been given her. It is one thing to receive information, and another to reproduce it in an imaginative picture; and, in fact, her imagination was busy with its own work while she sat and listened to this person or the other speaking of the sea-side town she was going to. When they spoke of promenades, and drives, and miles of hotels and lodging-houses, she was thinking of the sea-beach, and of the boats, and of the sky-line with its distant ships. When they told her of private theatricals, and concerts, and fancy-dress balls, she was thinking of being out on the open sea, with a light breeze filling the sails, and a curl of white foam rising at the bow and sweeping and hissing down the

sides of the boat. She would go down among the fishermen, when her husband and his friends were not by, and talk to them, and get to know what they sold their fish for down here in the South. She would find out what their nets cost; and if there was anybody in authority to whom they could apply for an advance of a few pounds in case of hard times. Had they their cuttings of peat free from the nearest moss-land; and did they dress their fields with the thatch that had got saturated with the smoke? Perhaps some of them could tell her where the crews hailed from that had repeatedly shot the sheep of the Flannen isles. All these, and a hundred other things, she would get to know; and she might procure and send to her father some rare bird, or curiosity of the sea, that might be added to the little museum in which she used to sing, in days gone by, when he was busy with his pipe and his whisky.

"You are not much tired, then, by your dissipation of last night," said Mrs. Kavanagh to her, at the station, as the slender, fair-haired, grave lady looked admiringly at the girl's fresh colour and bright grey-blue eyes. "It makes one envy you to see you looking so strong and in such good spirits."

"How happy you must be always," said Mrs. Lorraine, and the younger lady had the same sweet, low, and kindly voice as her mother.

"I am very well, thank you," said Sheila, blushing somewhat, and not lifting her eyes; while Lavender was impatient that she had not answered with a laugh and some light retort such as would have occurred to almost any woman in the circumstances.

On the journey down, Lavender and Mrs. Lorraine, seated opposite each other in two corner-seats, kept

up a continual cross-fire of small pleasantries, in which the young American lady had distinctly the best of it, chiefly by reason of her perfect manner. The keenest thing she said was said with a look of great innocence and candour in the large grey eyes; and then directly afterwards, she would say something very nice and pleasant, in precisely the same voice, as if she could not understand that there was any effort on the part of either to assume an advantage. The mother sometimes turned and listened to this aimless talk with an amused gravity, as of a cat watching the gambols of a kitten; but generally she devoted herself to Sheila, who sat opposite her. She did not talk much, and Sheila was glad of that; but the girl felt she was being observed with some little curiosity. She wished that Mrs. Kavanagh would turn those observant grey eyes of hers away in some other direction. Now and again, Sheila would point out what she considered strange or striking in the country outside; and for a moment the elderly lady would look out. But directly afterwards, the grey eyes would come back to Sheila; and the girl knew they were upon her. At last, she so persistently stared out of the window, that she fell to dreaming; and all the trees, and the meadows, and the farmhouses, and the distant heights and hollows, went past her as though they were in a sort of mist; while she replied to Mrs. Kavanagh's chance remarks in a mechanical fashion, and could only hear as a monotonous murmur the talk of the two people at the other side of the carriage. How much of the journey did the girl remember? She was greatly struck by the amount of open land in the neighbourhood of London —the commons between Wandsworth and Streatham and so forth—and she was pleased with the appearance

of the country about Redhill. For the rest, a succession of fair green pictures passed by her, all bathed in a calm, half-misty, summer sunlight; then they pierced the chalk hills (which Sheila, at first sight, fancied were of granite) and rumbled through the tunnels. Finally, with just a glimpse of a great mass of great houses filling a vast hollow and stretching up the bare green downs beyond—they found themselves in Brighton.

"Well, Sheila, what do you think of the place?" her husband said to her, in a kindly way, as they were driving down the Queen's Road.

She did not answer.

"It is not like Borvabost, is it?"

She was too bewildered to speak. She could only look about her with a vague wonder and disappointment. But surely this great city was not the place they had come to live in? Would it not disappear somehow, and they would get away to the sea, and the rocks, and the boats?

They passed into the upper part of the West Street, and here was another thoroughfare, down which Sheila glanced with no great interest. But the next moment, there was a quick catching of her breath, which almost resembled a sob; and a strange, glad light sprang into her eyes. Here, at last, was the sea! Away beyond the narrow thoroughfare she could catch a glimpse of a great green plain—yellow-green it was in the sunlight—that the wind was whitening here and there with tumbling waves. She had not noticed that there was any wind inland; there everything seemed asleep; but here there was a fresh breeze from the south, and the sea had been rough the day before, and now it was of this strange olive colour, streaked with the white

curls of foam that shone in the sunlight. Was there not a cold scent of sea-weed, too, blown up this narrow passage between the houses? And now the carriage cut round the corner, and whirled out into the glare of the Parade; and before her the great sea stretched out its leagues of tumbling and shining waves, and she heard the water roaring along the beach, and far away at the horizon she saw a phantom ship. She did not even look at the row of splendid hotels and houses, at the gaily dressed folks on the pavement, at the brilliant flags that were flapping and fluttering on the New Pier, and about the beach. It was the great world of shining water beyond that fascinated her, and awoke in her a strange yearning and longing, so that she did not know whether it was grief or joy that burned in her heart, and blinded her eyes with tears. Mrs. Kavanagh took her arm as they were going up the steps of the hotel, and said, in a friendly way, "I suppose you have some sad memories of the sea."

"No," said Sheila, bravely, "it is always pleasant to me to think of the sea; but it is a long time since —since——"

"Sheila," said her husband, abruptly, "do tell me if all your things are here;" and then the girl turned, calm and self collected, to look after rugs and boxes.

When they were finally established in the hotel, Lavender went off to negotiate for the hire of and carriage for Mrs. Kavanagh during her stay; and Sheila was left with the two ladies. They had tea in their sitting-room; and they had it at one of the windows, so that they could look out on the stream of people and carriages now beginning to flow by in the clear yellow light of the afternoon. But neither the people nor the carriages had much interest for Sheila, who,

indeed, sat for the most part silent, intently watching the various boats that were putting out or coming in, and busy with conjectures which she knew there was no use placing before her two companions.

"Brighton seems to surprise you very much," said Mrs. Lorraine.

"Yes," said Sheila, "I have been told all about it; but you will forget all that—and this is very different from the sea at home—at my home."

"Your home is in London now," said the elder lady, with a smile.

"Oh no!" said Sheila, most anxiously and earnestly. "London, that is not our home at all. We live there for a time; that will be quite necessary; but we shall go back to the Lewis some day soon—not to stay altogether, but enough to make it as much our home as London."

"How do you think Mr. Lavender will enjoy living in the Hebrides?" said Mrs. Lorraine, with a look of innocent and friendly inquiry in her eyes.

"It was many a time that he has said he never liked any place so much," said Sheila, with something of a blush; and then she added, with growing courage, "for you must not think he is always like what he is here. Oh no; when he is in the Highlands, there is no day that is nearly long enough for what has to be done in it; and he is up very early; and away to the loch or the hills with a gun or a salmon-rod. He can catch the salmon very well—oh, very well for one that is not accustomed; and he will shoot as well as anyone that is in the island, except my papa. It is a great deal to do there will be in the island, and plenty of amusement; and there is not much chance—not any whatever—of his

being lonely or tired when we go to live in the Lewis."

Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter were both amused and pleased by the earnest and rapid fashion in which Sheila talked. They had generally considered her to be a trifle shy and silent—not knowing how afraid she was of using wrong idioms or pronunciations; but here was one subject on which her heart was set, and she had no more thought as to whether she said "like-ah-ness" or likeness, or whether she said "gyarden" or garden. Indeed, she forgot more than that. She was somewhat excited by the presence of the sea, and the well-remembered sound of the waves; and she was pleased to talk about her life in the north, and about her husband's stay there, and how they should pass the time when she returned to Borva. She neglected altogether Lavender's injunctions that she should not talk about fishing, or cooking, or farming to his friends. She incidentally revealed to Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter a great deal more about the household at Borva than he would have wished to be known. For how could they understand about his wife having her own cousin to serve at table; and what would they think of a young lady who was proud of making her father's shirts? Whatever these two ladies may have thought, they were very obviously interested; and, if they were amused, it was in a far from unfriendly fashion. Mrs. Lorraine professed herself quite charmed with Sheila's descriptions of her island life; and wished she could go up to Lewis to see all these strange things. But when she spoke of visiting the island, when Sheila and her husband were staying there, Sheila was not nearly so ready to

offer her a welcome as the daughter of a hospitable old Highlandman ought to have been.

"And will you go out in a boat now?" said Sheila, looking down to the beach.

"In a boat? What sort of a boat?" said Mrs. Kavanagh.

"Any one of those little sailing boats—it is very good boats they are, as far as I can see."

"No, thank you," said the elderly lady, with a smile. "I am not fond of small boats; and the company of the men who go with you might be a little objectionable, I should fancy."

"But you need not take any men," said Sheila; the sailing of one of those little boats, it is very simple."

"Do you mean to say you could manage the boat by yourself?"

"Oh yes. It is very simple. And my husband, he will help me."

"And what would you do, if you went out?"

"We might try the fishing. I do not see where the rocks are; but we would go off the rocks, and put down the anchor, and try the lines. You would have some ferry good fish for breakfast, in the morning."

"My dear child," said Mrs. Kavanagh, "you don't know what you propose to us. To go and roll about in an open boat, in these waves—we should be ill in five minutes. But I suppose you don't know what sea-sickness is?"

"No," said Sheila, "but I will hear my husband speak of it often. And it is only in crossing the Channel that people will get sick."

"Why, this is the Channel!"

Sheila stared. Then she endeavoured to recall her geography. Of course, this must be a part of the

Channel; but if the people in the south became ill in this weather, they must be rather feeble creatures. Her speculations on this point were cut short by the entrance of her husband, who came to announce that he had not only secured a carriage for a month, but that it would be round at the hotel-door in half-an-hour; whereupon the two American ladies said they would be ready, and left the room.

"Now go off and get dressed, Sheila," said Lavender.

She stood for a moment irresolute.

"If you wouldn't mind," she said, after a moment's hesitation, "if you would allow me to go by myself—if you would go to the driving—and let me go down to the shore——"

"Oh, nonsense!" he said. "You will have people fancying you are only a schoolgirl. How can you go down to the beach by yourself among all those loafing vagabonds, who would pick your pocket or throw stones at you? You must behave like an ordinary Christian: now do, like a good girl, get dressed, and submit to the restraints of civilized life. It won't hurt you much."

So she left, to lay aside with some regret her rough blue dress: and he went downstairs to see about ordering dinner.

Had she come down to the sea, then, only to live the life that had nearly broken her heart in London? It seemed so. They drove up and down the Parade for about an hour and a half; and the roar of carriages drowned the rush of the waves. Then they dined in the quiet of this still summer evening; and she could only see the sea as a distant and silent picture through the windows, while the talk of her companions was either about the people whom they

had seen while driving, or about matters of which she knew nothing. Then the blinds were drawn, and candles lit; and still their conversation murmured around her unheeding ears. After dinner, her husband went down to the smoking room of the hotel to have a cigar; and she was left with Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter. She went to the window, and looked through a chink in the Venetian blinds. There was a beautiful clear twilight abroad, the darkness was still of a soft grey, and up in the pale yellow-green of the sky a large planet burned and throbbed. Soon the sea and the sky would darken; the stars would come forth in thousands and tens of thousands; and the moving water would be struck with a million trembling spots of silver, as the waves came onward to the beach.

"Mayn't we go out for a walk till Frank has finished his cigar?" said Sheila.

"You couldn't go out walking at this time of night," said Mrs. Kavanagh, in a kindly way; "you would meet the most unpleasant persons. Besides, going out into the night air would be most dangerous."

"It is a beautiful night," said Sheila, with a sigh. She was still standing at the window.

"Come," said Mrs. Kavanagh, going over to her and putting her hand in her arm. "We cannot have any moping, you know. You must be content to be dull with us for one night; and after to-night, we shall see what we can do to amuse you."

"Oh, but I don't want to be amused!" cried Sheila, almost in terror, for some vision flashed on her mind of a series of parties. "I would much rather be left alone, and allowed to go about by myself. But it is very kind of you," she hastily added

fancying that her speech had been somewhat ungracious; "it is very kind of you indeed."

"Come, I promised to teach you cribbage, didn't I?"

"Yes," said Sheila, with much resignation; and she walked to the table, and sat down.

Perhaps, after all, she could have spent the rest of the evening with some little equanimity, in patiently trying to learn this game, in which she had no interest whatever; but her thoughts and fancies were soon drawn away from cribbage. Her husband returned. Mrs. Lorraine had been for some little time at the big piano at the other side of the room, amusing herself by playing snatches of anything she happened to remember; but when Mr. Lavender returned, she seemed to wake up. He went over to her and sat down by the piano.

"Here," she said, "I have all the duets and songs you spoke of; and I am quite delighted with those I have tried. I wish Mamma would sing a second to me—how can one learn without practising? And there are some of those duets I really should like to learn after what you said of them."

"Shall I become a substitute for your mamma?" he said.

"And sing the second, so that I may practise? Your cigar must have left you in a very amiable mood."

"Well, suppose we try," he said, and he proceeded to open out the roll of music which she had brought down.

"Which shall we take first?" he asked.

"It does not much matter," she answered indifferently, and, indeed, she took up one of the duets by haphazard. What was it made Mrs. Kavanagh's companion suddenly lift her eyes from the cribbage-board,

and look with surprise to the other end of the room? She had recognized the little prelude to one of her own duets, and it was being played by Mrs. Lorraine. And it was Mrs. Lorraine who began to sing — in a sweet, expressive, and well-trained voice of no great power—

"Love in thine eyes for ever plays,"

and it was she to whom the answer was given—

"He in thy snowy bosom strays;"

and then, Sheila, sitting stupefied, and pained and confused, heard them sing together—

"He makes thy rosy lips his care,
And walks the mazes of thy hair."

She had not heard the short conversation which had introduced this music; and she could not tell but that her husband had been practising these duets — her duets — with some one else. For presently they sang, "When the rosy morn appearing," and "I would that my love could silently," and others, all of them, in Sheila's eyes, sacred to the time when she and Frank Lavender used to sit in the little room at Borva. It was no consolation to her that Mrs. Lorraine had but an imperfect acquaintance with them; that oftentimes she stumbled and went back over a bit of the accompaniment; that her voice was far from being striking. Lavender, at all events, seemed to heed none of these things. It was not as a music-master that he sang with her. He put as much expression of love into his voice as ever he had done in the old days when he sang with his future bride. And it seemed so cruel that this woman should have taken Sheila's own duets from her, to sing before her, with her own husband. Sheila learnt little more cribbage that even *ing*. Mrs. Kavanagh could not understand how he

pupil had become embarrassed, inattentive, and even sad; and asked her if she was tired. Sheila said she was very tired, and would go. And, when she got her candle, Mrs. Lorraine and Lavender had just discovered another duet which they felt bound to try together, as the last.

This was not the first time she had been more or less vaguely pained by her husband's attentions to this young American lady; and yet she would not admit to herself that he was any way in the wrong. She would entertain no suspicion of him. She would have no jealousy in her heart; for how could jealousy exist with a perfect faith? And so she had repeatedly reasoned herself out of these tentative feelings, and resolved that she would do neither her husband nor Mrs. Lorraine the injustice of being vexed with them. So it was now. What more natural than that Frank should recommend to any friend the duets of which he was particularly fond? What more natural than that this young lady should wish to show her appreciation of those songs by singing them; and who was to sing with her but he? Sheila would have no suspicion of either; and so she came down next morning determined to be very friendly with Mrs. Lorraine.

But that forenoon another thing occurred which nearly broke down all her resolves.

"Sheila," said her husband, "I don't think I ever asked you whether you rode."

"I used to ride many times at home," she said.

"But I suppose you'd rather not ride here," he said. "Mrs. Lorraine and I propose to go out presently: you'll be able to amuse yourself somehow till we come back."

Mrs. Lorraine had, indeed, gone to put on her habit; and her mother was with her.

"I suppose I may go out," said Sheila. "It is so very dull indoors, and Mrs. Kavanagh is afraid of the east wind, and she is not going out."

"Well, there's no harm in your going out; but I should have thought you'd have liked the comfort of watching the people pass from the window."

Sheila said nothing; but went off to her own room, and dressed to go out. Why, she knew not, but she felt she would rather not see her husband and Mrs. Lorraine start from the hotel-door. She stole downstairs, without going into the sitting-room; and then, going through the great hall and down the steps, found herself free and alone in Brighton.

It was a beautiful, bright, clear day, though the wind was a trifle chilly; and all around her there was a sense of space, and light, and motion in the shining skies, the far clouds, and the heaving and noisy sea. Yet she had none of the gladness of heart with which she used to rush out of the house at Borva, to drink in the fresh salt air, and feel the sunlight on her cheeks. She walked away, with her face wistful and pensive, along the King's Road, scarcely seeing any of the people who passed her; and the noise of the crowd and of the waves hummed in her ears in a distant fashion, even as she walked along the wooden railing over the beach. She stopped and watched some men putting off a heavy fishing-boat; and she still stood and looked long after the boat was launched. She would not confess to herself that she felt lonely and miserable: it was the sight of the sea that was melancholy. It seemed so different from the sea off Borva, that had always to her a familiar and friendly

look, even when it was raging and rushing before a south-west wind. Here this sea looked vast, and calm, and sad; and the sound of it was not pleasant to her ears as was the sound of the waves on the rocks at Borva. She walked on, in a blind and unthinking fashion, until she had got far up the Parade, and could see the long line of monotonous white cliff meeting the dull blue plain of the waves until both disappeared in the horizon.

She returned to the King's Road, a trifle tired, and sat down on one of the benches there. The passing of the people would amuse her; and now the pavement was thronged with a crowd of gaily-dressed folks, and the centre of the thoroughfare was brisk with the constant going and coming of riders. She saw strange old women, painted, powdered, and bewigged, in hideous imitation of youth, pounding up and down the level street, and she wondered what wild hallucinations possessed the brains of these poor creatures. She saw troops of beautiful young girls, with flowing hair, clear eyes, and bright complexions, riding by—a goodly company—under charge of a riding mistress; and the world seemed to grow sweeter when they came into view. But while she was vaguely gazing, and wondering, and speculating, her eyes were suddenly caught by two riders whose appearance sent a throb to her heart. Frank Lavender rode well; so did Mrs. Lorraine; and, though they were paying no particular attention to the crowd of passers-by, they doubtless knew that they could challenge criticism with an easy confidence. They were laughing and talking to each other as they went rapidly by; neither of them saw Sheila. The girl did not look after them. She rose and walked in the other direction, with a

greater pain at her heart than had been there for many a day.

What was this crowd? Some dozen or so of people were standing round a small girl who, accompanied by a man, was playing a violin, and playing it very well, too. But it was not the music that attracted Sheila to the child; but partly that there was a look about the timid, pretty face, and the modest and honest eyes, that reminded her of little Ailasa, and partly because, just at this moment, her heart seemed to be strangely sensitive and sympathetic. She took no thought of the people looking on. She went forward to the edge of the pavement, and found that the small girl and her companions were about to go away. Sheila stopped the man.

"Will you let your little girl come with me into this shop?"

It was a confectioner's shop.

"We were going home to dinner," said the man, while the small girl looked up with wondering eyes.

"Will you let her have dinner with me, and you will come back in half-an-hour?"

The man looked at the little girl; he seemed to be really fond of her, and saw that she was very willing to go. Sheila took her hand, and led her into the confectioner's shop, putting her violin on one of the small marble tables while they sat down at another. She was probably not aware that two or three idlers had followed them, and were staring with might and main in at the door of the shop.

What could this child have thought of the beautiful and yet sad-eyed lady who was so kind to her who got her all sorts of things with her own hands

and asked her all manner of questions in a low, gentle, and sweet voice? There was not much in Sheila's appearance to provoke fear or awe. The little girl, shy at first, got to be a little more frank; and told her hostess when she rose in the morning, how she practised, the number of hours they were out during the day, and many of the small incidents of her daily life. She had been photographed too, and her photograph was sold in one of the shops. She was very well content; she liked playing; the people were kind to her, and she did not often get tired.

"Then I shall see you often if I stay in Brighton?" said Sheila.

"We go out every day when it does not rain very hard."

"Perhaps some wet day you will come and see me, and you will have some tea with me; would you like that?"

"Yes, very much," said the small musician, looking up frankly.

Just at this moment—the half-hour having fully expired—the man appeared at the door.

"Don't hurry," said Sheila to the little girl; "sit still and drink up the lemonade; then I will give you some little parcels you must put in your pocket."

She was about to rise to go to the counter, when she suddenly met the eyes of her husband, who was calmly staring at her. He had come out, after their ride, with Mrs. Lorraine to have a stroll up and down the pavements, and had, in looking in at the various shops, caught sight of Sheila quietly having luncheon with this girl whom she had picked up in the streets.

"Did you ever see the like of that?" he said to Mrs. Lorraine. "In open day—with people staring in—

and she has not even taken the trouble to put the violin out of sight."

"The poor child means no harm," said his companion.

"Well, we must get her out of this somehow," he said, and so they entered the shop.

Sheila knew she was guilty the moment she met her husband's look, though she had never dreamed of it before. She had, indeed, acted quite thoughtlessly —perhaps chiefly moved by a desire to speak to some one, and to befriend some one in her own loneliness.

"Hadn't you better let this little girl go?" said Lavender to Sheila, with an embarrassed laugh, as soon as he had ordered an ice for his companion.

"When she has finished her lemonade she will go," said Sheila, meekly. "But I have to buy some things for her first."

"You have got a whole lot of people round the door," he said.

"It was very kind of the people to wait for her," answered Sheila, with the same composure. "We have been here half-an-hour. I suppose they will like her music very much."

The little violinist was now taken to the counter, and her pockets stuffed with packages of sugared fruits and other dainty delicacies; then she was permitted to go with half-a-crown in her hand. Mrs. Lorraine patted her shoulder in passing, and said she was a pretty little thing.

They went home to luncheon. Nothing was said about the incident of the forenoon, except that Lavender complained to Mrs. Kavanagh, in a humorous way, that his wife had a most extraordinary fondness for beggars: and that he never went home of an evening without

expecting to find her dining with the nearest scavenger and his family. Lavender, indeed, was in an amiable frame of mind at this meal (during the progress of which Sheila sat by the window, of course, for she had already lunched in company with the tiny violinist), and was bent on making himself as agreeable as possible to his two companions. Their talk had drifted towards the wanderings of the ladies on the Continent; from that to the Nibelungen frescoes in Munich; from that to the Nibelungen itself, and then, by easy transition, to the ballads of Uhland and Heine. Lavender was in one of his most impulsive and brilliant moods —gay and jocular, tender and sympathetic by turns, and so obviously sincere in all that his listeners were delighted with his speeches, and assertions, and stories, and believed them as implicitly as he did himself. Sheila, sitting at a distance, saw and heard, and could not help recalling many an evening in the far north, when Lavender used to fascinate everyone around him by the infection of his warm and poetic enthusiasm. How he talked, too—telling the stories of these quaint and pathetic ballads in his own rough-and-ready translations—while there was no self-consciousness in his face, but a thorough warmth of earnestness; and sometimes, too, she would notice a quiver of the under lip that she knew of old, when some pathetic point or phrase had to be indicated rather than described. He was drawing pictures for them as well as telling stories —of the three students entering the room in which the landlady's daughter lay dead—of Barbarossa in his cave —of the child who used to look up at Heine as he passed her in the street, awe-stricken by his pale and strange face—of the last of the band of companions who sat in the solitary room in which they had sat,

and drank to their memory—of the King of Thule, and the deserter from Strasburg, and a thousand others.

"But is there any of them—is there anything in the world more pitiable than that pilgrimage to Kevlaar?" he said. "You know it, of course. No! Oh! you must, surely. Don't you remember the mother who stood by the bedside of her sick son, and asked him whether he would not rise to see the great procession go by the window; and he tells her that he cannot—he is so ill—his heart is breaking for thinking of his dead Gretchen? *You* know the story, Sheila. The mother begs him to rise and come with her, and they will join the band of pilgrims going to Kevlaar, to be healed there of their wounds by the Mother of God. Then you find them at Kevlaar, and all the maimed and the lame people have come to the shrine; and whichever limb is diseased, they make a waxen image of that, and lay it on the altar, and then they are healed. Well, the mother of this poor lad takes wax and forms a heart out of it, and says to her son, 'Take that to the Mother of God, and she will heal your pain.' Sighing, he takes the wax heart in his hand, and, sighing, he goes to the shrine; and there, with tears running down his face, he says, 'O beautiful Queen of Heaven, I am come to tell you my grief. I lived with my mother in Cologne—near us lived Gretchen—who is dead now. Blessed Mary, I bring you this wax heart; heal the wound in my heart.' And then—and then——"

Sheila saw his lip tremble. But he frowned, and said, impatiently—

"What a shame it is to destroy such a beautiful story! You can have no idea of it—of its simplicity and tenderness——"

"But pray let us hear the rest of it," said Mrs. Lorraine, gently.

"Well, the last scene, you know, is a small chamber, and the mother and her sick son are asleep. The Blessed Mary glides into the chamber, and bends over the young man, and puts her hand lightly on his heart. Then she smiles and disappears. The mother has seen all this in a dream, and now she awakes, for the dogs are barking loudly. The mother goes over to the bed of her son, and he is dead, and the morning light touches his pale face. And then the mother meekly folds her hands,—and says——"

He rose hastily, with a gesture of fretfulness, and walked over to the window at which Sheila sat, and looked out. She put her hand up to his; he took it.

"The next time I try to translate Heine," he said, making it appear that he had broken off through vexation, "something strange will happen."

"It is a beautiful story," said Mrs. Lorraine, who had herself been crying a little bit, in a covert way; "I wonder I have not seen a translation of it. Come, Mamma, Lady Leveret said we were not to be after four."

So they rose and left; and Sheila was alone with her husband, and still holding his hand. She looked up at him timidly, wondering, perhaps, in her simple way, as to whether she should not now pour out her heart to him; and tell him all her griefs, and fears, and yearnings. He had obviously been deeply moved by the story he had told so roughly; surely now was a good opportunity of appealing to him, and begging for sympathy and compassion.

"Frank," she said, and she rose, and came close, and bent down her head to hide the colour in her face.

"Well?" he answered.

"You won't be vexed with me," she said, in a low voice, and with her heart beginning to beat rapidly.

"Vexed with you about what, Sheila?" he said.

Alas! all her hopes had fled. She shrank from the wondering look with which she knew he was regarding her. She felt it to be impossible that she should place before him those confidences with which she had approached him; and so, with a great effort, she merely said—

"Are we to go to Lady Leveret's?"

"I suppose so," he said, "unless you would rather go and see some blind fiddler or beggar. Sheila, you should really not be so forgetful; what if Lady Leveret, for example, had come into that shop? You should remember you are a woman, and not a child. Do you ever see Mrs. Kavanagh or her daughter do any of these things?"

Sheila had let go his hand; her eyes were still turned towards the ground. She had fancied that a little of that emotion that had been awakened in him by the story of the German mother and her son might warm his heart towards herself, and render it possible for her to talk to him frankly about all that she had been dimly thinking, and more definitely suffering. She was mistaken: that was all.

"I will try to do better, and please you," she said; and then she went away.

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A PRINCESS OF THULE BY WILLIAM BLACK.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

A

PRINCESS OF THULE.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,
AUTHOR OF "A DAUGHTER OF HETH."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ
1874.

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A PRINCESS OF THULE.

CHAPTER I.

A Friend in Need.

WAS it a delusion that had grown up in the girl's mind, and now held full possession of it—that she was in a world with which she had no sympathy, that she should never be able to find a home there, that the influences of it were gradually and surely stealing from her her husband's love and confidence? Or was this longing to get away from the people and the circumstances that surrounded her, but the unconscious promptings of an incipient jealousy? She did not question her own mind closely on these points. She only vaguely knew that she was miserable, and that she could not tell her husband of the weight that pressed on her heart.

Here, too, as they drove along to have tea with a certain Lady Leveret, who was one of Lavender's especial patrons, and to whom he had introduced Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter, Sheila felt that she was a stranger, an interloper, a "third wheel to the cart." She scarcely spoke a word. She looked at the sea; but she had almost grown to regard that great plain of smooth water as a melancholy and monotonous thing—not the bright and boisterous sea of her youth, with its winding channels, its secret bays and rocks,

its salt winds, and rushing waves. She was disappointed with the perpetual wall of white cliff, where she had expected to see something of the black and rugged shore of the north. She had as yet made no acquaintance with the sea-life of the place; she did not know where the curers lived, whether they gave the fishermen credit and cheated them, whether the people about here made any use of the back of the dog-fish, or could, in hard seasons, cook any of the wild fowl; what the ling, and the cod, and the skate fetched; where the wives and daughters sat and span and carded their wool; whether they knew how to make a good dish of cockles boiled in milk. She smiled to herself when she thought of asking Mrs. Lorraine about any such things; but she still cherished some vague hope that, before she left Brighton, she would have some little chance of getting near to the sea and learning a little of the sea-life down in the south.

And as they drove along the King's Road on this afternoon, she suddenly called out—

"Look, Frank!"

On the steps of the Old Ship hotel stood a small man with a brown face, a brown beard, and a beaver hat, who was calmly smoking a wooden pipe, and looking at an old woman selling oranges in front of him.

"It is Mr. Ingram!" said Sheila.

"Which is Mr. Ingram!" asked Mrs. Lorraine, with considerable interest, for she had often heard Lavender speak of his friend. "Not that little man?"

"Yes," said Lavender, coldly: he could have wished that Ingram had had some little more regard for appearances in so public a place as the main thoroughfare of Brighton.

"Won't you stop and speak to him?" said Sheila, with great surprise.

"We are late already," said her husband. "But if you would rather go back and speak to him than go on with us, you may."

Sheila said nothing more; and so they drove on to the end of the Parade, where Lady Leveret held possession of a big white house with pillars, overlooking the broad street and the sea.

But next morning she said to him—

"I suppose you will be riding with Mrs. Lorraine this morning?"

"I suppose so."

"I should like to go and see Mr. Ingram, if he is still there," she said.

"Ladies don't generally call at hotels and ask to see gentlemen," he said, with a laugh and a shrug; "but of course you don't care for that."

The permission, if it was intended to be a permission, was not very gracious, but Sheila accepted it, and very shortly after breakfast she changed her dress and went out. How pleasant it was to feel that she was going to see her old friend, to whom she could talk freely! The morning seemed to know of her gladness, and to share in it; for there was a brisk southerly breeze blowing fresh in from the sea, and the waves were leaping white in the sunlight. There was no more sluggishness in the air, or the grey sky, or the leaden plain of the sea. Sheila knew that the blood was mantling in her cheeks; that her heart was full of joy; that her whole frame so tingled with life and spirit that, had she been in Borva, she would have challenged her deer-hound to a race, and fled down the side of the hill with him to the small bay

of white sand below the house. She did not pause for a minute when she reached the hotel. She went up the steps, opened the door, and entered the square hall. There was an odour of tobacco in the place; and several gentlemen standing about rather confused her, for she had to glance at them in looking for a waiter. Another minute would probably have found her a trifle embarrassed: but just at this crisis she saw Ingram himself come out of a room, with a cigarette in his hand. He threw away the cigarette, and came forward to her with amazement in his eyes.

"Where is Mr. Lavender? Has he gone into the smoking-room for me?" he asked.

"He is not here," said Sheila. "I have come for you by myself."

For a moment, too, Ingram felt the eyes of the men on him; but directly he said, with a fine air of carelessness, "Well, that is very good of you. Shall we go out for a stroll until your husband comes?"

So he opened the door and followed her outside, into the fresh air and the roar of the waves.

"Well, Sheila," he said, "this is very good of you, really: where is Mr. Lavender?"

"He generally rides with Mrs. Lorraine in the morning."

"And what do you do?"

"I sit at the window."

"Don't you go boating?"

"No, I have not been in a boat. They do not care for it. And yesterday, it was a letter to Papa I was writing, and I could tell him nothing about the people here or the fishing."

"But you could not in any case, Sheila. I suppose you would like to know what they pay for their

lines, and how they dye their wool, and so on; but you would find the fishermen here don't live in that way at all. They are all civilized, you know, they buy their cloth in the shops. They never eat any sort of seaweed, or dye with it either. However, I will tell you all about it by and by. At present, I suppose you are returning to your hotel."

A quick look of pain and disappointment passed over her face, as she turned to him for a moment, with something of entreaty in her eyes.

"I came to see you," she said. "But perhaps you have an engagement—I do not wish to take up any of your time—if you please, I will go back alone to——"

"Now, Sheila," he said, with a smile, and with the old friendly look she knew so well, "you must not talk like that to me. I won't have it. You know I came down to Brighton because you asked me to come; and my time is altogether at your service."

"And you have no engagement just now?" said Sheila, with her face brightening.

"No."

"And you will take me down to the shore, to see the boats, and the nets? Or could we go out and run along the coast for a few miles? It is a very good wind."

"Oh, I should be very glad," said Ingram, slowly. "I should be delighted. But, you see, wouldn't your husband think it—wouldn't he, you know—wouldn't it seem just a little odd to him if you were to go away like that?"

"He is to go riding with Mrs. Lorraine," said Sheila, quite simply. "He does not want me."

"Of course you told him you were coming to see —you were going to call at the Old Ship?"

"Yes. And I am sure he would not be surprised if I did not return for a long time."

"Are you quite sure, Sheila?"

"Yes, I am quite sure."

"Very well. Now I shall tell you what I am going to do with you. I shall first go and bribe some mercenary boatman to let us have one of those small sailing boats committed to our own exclusive charge. I shall constitute you skipper and pilot of the craft, and hold you responsible for my safety. I shall smoke a pipe to prepare me for whatever may befall——"

"Oh, no," said Sheila. "You must work very hard; and I will see if you remember all that I taught you in the Lewis. And if we can have some long lines, we might get some fish. Will they pay more than thirty shillings for their long lines in this country?"

"I don't know," said Ingram. "I believe most of the fishermen here live upon the shillings they get from passers-by, after a little conversation about the weather, and their hard lot in life; so that one doesn't talk to them more than one can help."

"But why do they need the money? Is there no fish?"

"I don't know that, either. I suppose there is some good fishing in the winter, and sometimes in the summer they get some big shoals of mackerel."

"It was a letter I had last week from the sister of one of the men of the *Nighean-dubh*, and she told me that they have been very lucky all through the last season, and it was near six thousand ling they got."

"But I suppose they are hopelessly in debt to some curer or other up about Habost?"

"Oh no, not all. It is their own boat—it is not hired to them. And it is a very good boat whatever."

That unlucky "whatever" had slipped out inadvertently; the moment she had uttered it, she blushed, and looked timidly towards her companion, fearing that he had noticed it. He had not. How could she have made such a blunder? she asked herself. She had been most particular about the avoidance of this word, even in the Lewis. The girl did not know that, from the moment she had left the steps of the Old Ship, in company with this good friend of hers, she had unconsciously fallen into much of her old pronunciation and her old habit of speech; while Ingram, much more familiar with the Sheila of Borvabost and Loch Roag than the Sheila of Notting Hill and Kensington Gardens, did not perceive the difference, but was mightily pleased to hear her talk in any fashion whatsoever.

By fair means or foul, Ingram managed to secure a pretty little sailing vessel which lay at anchor out near the New Pier; and when the pecuniary negotiations were over, Sheila was invited to walk down over the loose stones of the beach, and take command of the craft. The boatman was still very doubtful. When he had pulled them out to the boat, however, and put them on board, he speedily perceived that this handsome young lady not only knew everything that had to be done in the way of getting the small vessel ready, but had a very smart and business-like way of doing it. It was very obvious that her companion did not know half as much about the matter

as she did; but he was obedient and watchful, and presently they were ready to start. The man put off in his boat to shore again much relieved in mind, but not a little puzzled to understand where the young lady had picked up, not merely her knowledge of boats, but the ready way in which she put her delicate hands to hard work, and the prompt and effectual fashion in which she accomplished it.

"Shall I belay away the jib, or reef the upper hatchways?" Ingram called out to Sheila, when they had fairly got under way.

She did not answer for a moment; she was still watching, with a critical eye, the manner in which the boat answered to her wishes; and then, when everything promised well, and she was quite satisfied, she said—

"If you will take my place for a moment, and keep a good look-out, I will put on my gloves."

She surrendered the tiller and the mainsail sheet into his care, and, with another glance ahead, pulled out her gloves.

"You did not use to fear the salt water or the sun on your hands, Sheila," said her companion.

"I do not now," she said, "but Frank would be displeased to see my hands brown. He has himself such pretty hands."

What Ingram thought about Frank Lavender's delicate hands he was not going to say to his wife; and, indeed, he was called upon at this moment to let Sheila resume her post, which she did with an air of great satisfaction and content.

And so they ran lightly through the curling and dashing water on this brilliant day, caring little indeed for the great town that lay away to leeward, with its

shining terraces surmounted by a faint cloud of smoke. Here all the roar of carriages and people was unheard: the only sound that accompanied their talk was the splashing of the waves at the prow and the hissing and gurgling of the water along the boat. The south wind blew fresh and sweet around them, filling the broad, white sails, and fluttering the small pennon up there in the blue. It seemed strange to Sheila that she should be so much alone with so great a town close by; that under the boom she could catch a glimpse of the noisy Parade without hearing any of its noise. But there, away to windward, there was no more trace of city life—only the great blue sea, with its waves flowing on towards them from out of the far horizon, and with here and there a pale ship just appearing on the line where the sky and ocean met.

"Well, Sheila, how do you like to be on the sea again?" said Ingram, getting out his pipe.

"Oh, very well. But you must not smoke, Mr. Ingram; you must attend to the boat."

"Don't you feel at home in her yet?" he asked.

"I am not afraid of her," said Sheila, regarding the lines of the small craft with the eye of a shipbuilder, "but she is very narrow in the beam, and she carries too much sail for so small a thing. I suppose they have not any squalls on this coast, where you have no hills, and no Narrows to go through."

"It doesn't remind you of Lewis, does it?" he said, filling his pipe all the same.

"A little—out there it does," she said, turning to the broad plain of the sea; "but it is not much that is in this country that is like the Lewis—sometimes I think I shall be a stranger when I go back to the

Lewis, and the people will scarcely know me, and everything will be changed."

He looked at her for a second or two. Then he laid down his pipe, which had not been lit, and said to her, gravely—

"I want you to tell me, Sheila, why you have got into a habit lately of talking about many things, and especially about your home in the north, in that sad way. You did not do that when you came to London first; and yet it was then that you might have been struck and shocked by the difference. You had no home-sickness for a long time—but is it home-sickness, Sheila?"

How was she to tell him? For an instant she was on the point of giving him all her confidence; and then, somehow or other, it occurred to her that she would be wronging her husband in seeking such sympathy from a friend as she had been expecting—and expecting in vain—from him.

"Perhaps it is home-sickness," she said, in a low voice, while she pretended to be busy tightening up the mainsail sheet. "I should like to see Borva again."

"But you don't want to live there all your life?" he said. "You know that would be unreasonable, Sheila, even if your husband could manage it, and I don't suppose he can. Surely your papa does not expect you to go and live in Lewis always?"

"Oh no," she said, eagerly. "You must not think my papa wishes anything like that. It will be much less than that he was thinking of when he used to speak to Mr. Lavender about it. And I do not wish to live in the Lewis always—I have no dislike to London—none at all—only that—that——"

And here she paused.

"Come, Sheila," he said, in the old paternal way to which she had been accustomed to yield up all her own wishes in the old days of their friendship, "I want you to be frank with me, and tell me what is the matter. I know there is something wrong; I have seen it for some time back. Now you know I took the responsibility of your marriage on my shoulders; and I am responsible to you, and to your papa and to myself, for your comfort and happiness. Do you understand?"

She still hesitated—grateful in her inmost heart; but still doubtful as to what she should do.

"You look on me as an intermeddler," he said, with a smile.

"No, no!" she said, "you have always been our best friend."

"But I have intermeddled none the less—don't you remember when I told you I was prepared to accept the consequences?"

It seemed so long a time since then!

"And once having begun to intermeddle, I can't stop, don't you see? Now, Sheila, you'll be a good little girl, and do what I tell you. You'll take the boat a long way out, we'll put her head round, take down the sails, and let her tumble about and drift for a time, till you tell me all about your troubles, and then we'll see what can be done."

She obeyed in silence; with her face grown grave enough in anticipation of the coming disclosures. She knew that the first plunge into them would be keenly painful to her; but there was a feeling at her heart that, this penance over, a great relief would be at

hand. She trusted this man as she would have trusted her own father. She knew that there was nothing on earth he would not attempt, if he fancied it would help her. And she knew, too, that having experienced so much of his great unselfishness and kindness and thoughtfulness, she was ready to obey him implicitly, in anything that he could assure her was right for her to do.

How far away seemed the white cliffs now, and the faint green downs above them! Brighton, lying farther to the west, had become dim and yellow, and over it a cloud of smoke lay thick and brown in the sunlight. A mere streak showed the line of the King's Road and all its carriages and people; the beach beneath could just be made out by the white dots of the bathing-machines. The brown fishing-boats seemed to be close in shore; the two piers were foreshortened into small dusky masses marking the beginning of the sea. And then, from these distant and faintly-defined objects, out here to the side of the small white-and-pink boat, that lay lightly in the lapping water, stretched that great and moving network of waves, with here and there a sharp gleam of white foam curling over amid the dark blue-green.

Ingram took his seat by Sheila's side, so that he should not have to look in her downcast face; and then, with some little preliminary nervousness and hesitation, the girl told her story. She told it to sympathetic ears: and yet Ingram—having partly guessed how matters stood, and anxious, perhaps, to know whether much of her trouble might not be merely the result of fancies which could be reasoned and explained away—was careful to avoid anything like corroboration. He let her talk in her own simple

and artless way; and the girl spoke to him, after a little while, with an earnestness which showed how deeply she felt her position. At the very outset she told him that her love for her husband had never altered for a moment—that all the prayer and desire of her heart was that they two might be to each other as she had at one time hoped they would be, when he got to know her better. She went over all the story of her coming to London, of her first experiences there, of the conviction that grew upon her that her husband was somehow disappointed with her and only anxious now that she should conform to the ways and habits of the people with whom he associated. She spoke of her efforts to obey his wishes, and how heart-sick she was with her failures, and of the dissatisfaction which he showed. She spoke of the people to whom he devoted his life; of the way in which he passed his time; and of the impossibility of her showing him, so long as he thus remained apart from her, the love she had in her heart for him, and the longing for sympathy which that love involved. And then she came to the question of Mrs. Lorraine; and here it seemed to Ingram she was trying at once to put her husband's conduct in the most favourable light, and to blame herself for her unreasonableness. Mrs. Lorraine was a pleasant companion to him: she could talk cleverly and brightly; she was pretty, and she knew a large number of his friends. Sheila was anxious to show that it was the most natural thing in the world that her husband, finding her so out of communion with his ordinary surroundings, should make an especial friend of this graceful and fascinating woman. And if, at times, it hurt her to be left

alone—but here the girl broke down somewhat, and Ingram pretended not to know that she was crying.

These were strange things to be told to a man; and they were difficult to answer. But out of these revelations—which rather took the form of a cry than of any distinct statement—he formed a notion of Sheila's position sufficiently exact; and the more he looked at it, the more alarmed and pained he grew, for he knew more of her than her husband did. He knew the latent force of character that underlay all her submissive gentleness. He knew the keen sense of pride her Highland birth had given her; and he feared what might happen if this sensitive and proud heart of hers were driven into rebellion by some—possibly unintentional—wrong. And this high-spirited, fearless, honour-loving girl—who was gentle and obedient, not through any timidity or limpness of character, but because she considered it her duty to be gentle and obedient—was to be cast aside, and have her tenderest feelings outraged and wounded, for the sake of an unscrupulous, shallow-brained woman of fashion who was not fit to be Sheila's waiting-maid. Ingram had never seen Mrs. Lorraine; but he had formed his own opinion of her. The opinion, based upon nothing, was wholly wrong; but it served to increase, if that were possible, his sympathy with Sheila, and his resolve to interfere on her behalf at whatever cost.

"Sheila," he said, gravely putting his hand on her shoulder, as if she were still the little girl who used to run wild with him about the Borva rocks, "you are a good woman."

He added to himself that Lavender knew little of *the* value of the wife he had got; but he dared not

say that to Sheila, who would suffer no imputation against her husband to be uttered in her presence, however true it might be, or however much she had cause to know it to be true.

"And after all," he said, in a lighter voice, "I think I can do something to mend all this. I will say for Frank Lavender that he is a thoroughly good fellow at heart; and that when you appeal to him, and put things fairly before him, and show him what he ought to do, there is not a more honourable and straightforward man in the world. I believe, if I wanted money this moment, and it could only be got that way, he would live for a month on bread and water to give it me. He is not selfish, Sheila, but he is thoughtless. He has been led away by these people, you know, and has not been aware of what you were suffering. When I put the matter before him, you will see it will be all right; and I hope to persuade him to give up this constant idling, and take to his work, and have something to live for. I wish you and I together could get him to go away from London altogether—get him to take to serious landscape painting on some wild coast—the Galway coast, for example——"

"Why not the Lewis?" said Sheila, her heart turning to the north as naturally as the needle.

"Or the Lewis. And I should like you and him to live away from hotels, and luxuries, and all such things; and he would work all day, and you would do the cooking, in some small cottage you could rent, you know——"

"You make me so happy in thinking of that," she said, with her eyes growing wet again.

"And why should he not do so? There is nothing

romantic or idyllic about it; but a good, wholesome, plain sort of life, that is likely to make an honest painter of him, and bring both of you some well-earned money. And you might have a boat like this——"

"We are drifting too far in," said Sheila, suddenly rising. "Shall we go back now?"

"By all means," he said; and so the small boat was put under canvas again, and was soon making way through the breezy water.

"Well, all this seems simple enough, doesn't it?" said Ingram.

"Yes," said the girl, with her face full of hope.

"And then, of course, when you are quite comfortable together, and making heaps of money, you can turn round and abuse me, and say I made all the mischief to begin with."

"Did we do so before, when you were very kind to us?" she said, in a low voice.

"Oh, but that was different. To interfere on behalf of two young folks who are in love with each other is dangerous; but to interfere between two people who are married—that is a certain quarrel. I wonder what you will say when you are scolding me, Sheila, and bidding me get out of the house. I have never heard you scold. Is it Gaelic or English you prefer?"

"I prefer whichever can say the nicest things to my very good friends, and tell them how grateful I am for their kindness to me."

"Ah, well, we'll see."

When they got back to shore it was half-past one.

"You will come and have some luncheon with us," said Sheila, when they had gone up the steps and into the King's Road.

"Will that lady be there?"

"Mrs. Lorraine? Yes."

"Then I'll come some other time."

"But why not now?" said Sheila. "It is not necessary that you will see us only to speak about those things we have been talking over?"

"Oh no, not at all. If you and Mr. Lavender were by yourselves I should come at once."

"And you are afraid of Mrs. Lorraine?" said Sheila, with a smile. "She is a very nice lady indeed—you have no cause to dislike her."

"But I don't want to meet her, Sheila, that is all," he said; and she knew well, by the precision of his manner, that there was no use trying to persuade him further.

He walked along to the hotel with her, meeting a considerable stream of fashionably-dressed folks on the way; and neither he nor she seemed to remember that his costume—a blue pilot-jacket, not a little worn and soiled with the salt water, and a beaver hat that had seen a good deal of rough weather in the Highlands—was much more comfortable than elegant. He said to her, as he left her at the hotel—

"Would you mind telling Lavender I shall drop in at half-past three, and that I expect to see him in the coffee-room? I sha'n't keep him five minutes."

She looked at him for a moment; and he saw that she knew what his appointment meant, for her eyes were full of gladness and gratitude. He went away pleased at heart that she put so much trust in him. And in this case, he should be able to reward that confidence; for Lavender was really a good sort of fellow, and would at once be sorry for the wrong he had unintentionally done, and be only too anxious to set it right. He ought to leave Brighton at once, and

London too. He ought to go away into the country, or by the seaside, and begin working hard, to earn money and self-respect at the same time; and then, in this friendly solitude, he would get to know something about Sheila's character, and begin to perceive how much more valuable were these genuine qualities of heart and mind than any social graces such as might lighten up a dull drawing-room. Had Lavender yet learnt to know the worth of an honest woman's perfect love and unquestioning devotion? Let these things be put before him, and he would go and do the right thing, as he had many a time done before, in obedience to the lecturing of his friend.

Ingram called at half-past three, and went into the coffee-room. There was no one in the long, large room; and he sat down at one of the small tables by the windows, from which a bit of lawn, the King's Road, and the sea beyond were visible. He had scarcely taken his seat when Lavender came in.

"Hallo, Ingram, how are you?" he said, in his freest and friendliest way. "Won't you come upstairs? Have you had lunch? Why did you go to the Ship?"

"I always go to the Ship," he said. "No, thank you, I won't go upstairs."

"You are a most unsociable sort of brute!" said Lavender, frankly. "I shall paint a portrait of you some day, in the character of Diogenes, or Apemantus, or some one like that. I should like to do a portrait of you for Sheila—how pleased she would be! Will you take a glass of sherry?"

"No, thank you."

"Will you have a game at billiards?"

"No, thank you. You don't mean to say you would play billiards on such a day as this?"

"It *is* a fine day, isn't it?" said Lavender, turning to look at the sunlit road and the blue sea. "By the way, Sheila tells me you and she were out sailing this morning. It must have been very pleasant—especially for her, for she is mad about such things. What a curious girl she is, to be sure! Don't you think so?"

"I don't know what you mean by curious," said Ingram, coldly.

"Well, you know, strange—odd—unlike other people in her ways and her fancies. Did I tell you about my aunt taking her to see some friends of hers at Norwood? No? Well, Sheila had got out of the house somehow (I suppose their talking did not interest her), and when they went in search of her, they found her in the cemetery, crying like a child."

"What about?"

"Why," said Lavender, with a smile, "merely because so many people had died. She had never seen anything like that before—you know the small churchyards up in Lewis, with their inscriptions in Norwegian, and Danish, and German. I suppose the first sight of all the white stones at Norwood was too much for her."

"Well, I don't see much of a joke in that," said Ingram.

"Who said there was any joke in it?" cried Lavender, impatiently. "I never knew such a cantankerous fellow as you are. You are always fancying I am finding fault with Sheila. And I never do anything of the kind. She is a very good girl indeed. I have every reason to be satisfied with the way our marriage has turned out."

"*Has she?*"

The words were not important: but there was something in the tone in which they were spoken that suddenly checked Frank Lavender's careless flow of speech. He looked at Ingram for a moment, with some surprise, and then he said—

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I will tell you what I mean," said Ingram, slowly. "It is an awkward thing for a man to interfere between husband and wife, I am aware. He gets something else than thanks for his pains, ordinarily; but sometimes it has to be done, thanks or kicks. Now, you know, Lavender, I had a good deal to do with helping forward your marriage in the north; and I don't remind you of that to claim anything in the way of consideration, but to explain why I think I am called on to speak to you now."

Lavender was at once a little frightened and a little irritated. He half guessed what might be coming from the slow and precise manner in which Ingram talked. That form of speech had vexed him many a time before; for he would rather have had any amount of wild contention, and bandying about of reproaches, than the calm, unimpassioned and sententious setting forth of his shortcomings to which this sallow little man was perhaps too much addicted.

"I suppose Sheila has been complaining to you, then?" said Lavender, coldly.

"You may suppose what you like," said Ingram, quietly; "but it would be a good deal better if you would listen to me patiently, and deal in a common-sense fashion with what I have got to say. It is nothing very desperate. Nothing has happened that *is not* of easy remedy; while the remedy would leave

you and her in a much better position, both as regards your own estimation of yourselves, and the opinion of your friends."

"You are a little roundabout, Ingram," said Lavender, "and ornate. But I suppose all lectures begin so. Go on."

Ingram laughed.

"If I am too formal, it is because I don't want to make mischief by any exaggeration. Look here. A long time before you were married, I warned you that Sheila had very keen and sensitive notions about the duties that people ought to perform—about the dignity of labour—about the proper occupations of a man, and so forth. These notions you may regard as romantic and absurd, if you like; but you might as well try to change the colour of her eyes as attempt to alter any of her beliefs in that direction——"

"And she thinks that I am idle and indolent because I don't care what a washerwoman pays for her candles," said Lavender, with impetuous contempt. "Well, be it so. She is welcome to her opinion. But if she is grieved at heart because I can't make hob-nailed boots, it seems to me that she might as well come and complain to myself, instead of going and detailing her wrongs to a third person, and calling for his sympathy in the character of an injured wife."

For an instant the dark eyes of the man opposite him blazed with a quick fire—for a sneer at Sheila was worse than an insult to himself; but he kept quite calm, and said

"That, unfortunately, is not what is troubling her——"

Lavender rose abruptly, took a turn up and down the empty room, and said—

"If there is anything the matter, I prefer to hear it from herself. It is not respectful to me, that she should call in a third person to humour her whims and fancies——"

"Whims and fancies!" said Ingram, with that dark light returning to his eyes. "Do you know what you are talking about? Do you know that, while you are living upon the charity of a woman you despise, and dawdling about the skirts of another woman who laughs at you, you are breaking the heart of a girl who has not her equal in England? Whims and fancies! Good God! I wonder how she ever could have——"

He stopped, but the mischief was done. These were not prudent words to come from a man who wished to step in as mediator between husband and wife—perhaps they were as unjust as they were imprudent; but Ingram's blaze of wrath—kindled by what he considered the insufferable insolence of Lavender in thus speaking of Sheila—had swept all notions of prudence from it. Lavender, indeed, was much cooler than he was, and said, with an affectation of carelessness—

"I am sorry you should vex yourself so much about Sheila. One would think you had had the ambition yourself, at some time or other, to play the part of husband to her; and doubtless then you would have made sure that all her idle fancies were gratified. As it is, I was about to relieve you from the trouble of further explanation by saying that I was quite competent to manage my own affairs; and that if Sheila has any complaint to make, she must make it to me."

Ingram rose, and was silent for a moment.

"Lavender," he said, "it does not matter much

whether you and I quarrel—I was prepared for that, in any case. But I ask you to give Sheila a chance of telling you what I had intended to tell you."

"Indeed, I shall do nothing of the sort. I never invite confidences. When she wishes to tell me anything, she knows I am ready to listen. But I am quite satisfied with the position of affairs as they are at present."

"God help you, then," said his friend, and went away, scarcely daring to confess to himself how dark the future looked.

CHAPTER II.

Exchanges.

JUST as Frank Lavender went downstairs to meet Ingram, a letter which had been forwarded from London was brought to Sheila. It bore the Lewis postmark, and she guessed it was from Duncan, for she had told Mairi to ask the tall keeper to write, and she knew he would hasten to obey her request at any sacrifice of comfort to himself. Sheila sat down to read the letter in a happy frame of mind. She had every confidence that all her troubles were about to be removed now that her good friend Ingram had come to her husband; and here was a message to her from her home, that seemed, even before she read it, to beg of her to come thither, light-hearted and joyous. This was what she read:—

"BORVABOST, THE ISLAND OF LEWS,
"*the third Aug.*, 18—.

"HONOURED MRS. LAVENDER,—It waz Mairi waz sayin that you will want me to write to you, bit I am not good at the writen whatever, and it waz 2 years

since I waz writen to Amerika, to John Ferkason that kept the tea-shop in Stornoway, and was trooned in coming home the verra last year before this. It waz Mairi will say you will like a letter as well as any one that waz goin to Amerika, for the news and the things, and you will be as far away from us as if you waz living in Amerika or Glaska. But there is not much news, for the lads they hev all pulled up the boats, and they are away to Wick, and Sandy McDougal that waz living by Loch Langavat he will be going too, for he waz up at the sheilings when Mrs. Paterson's lasses waz there with the cows, and it waz Jeanie the youngest and him made it up, and he haz twenty-five pounds in the bank, which is a good thing too mirover for the young couple. It waz many a one waz sayin when the crows and the sheep waz come home from the sheilings that never afore waz Miss Sheila away from Loch Roag when the cattle would be swimmin across the loch to the island; and I will say to many of them verra well you will wait and you will see Miss Sheila back again in the Lews and it wazna allwas you would lif away from your own home where you was born and the people will know you from the one year to the next. John McNicol of Habost he will be verra bad three months or two months ago, and we waz thinkin he will die, and him with a wife and five bairns too, and four cows and a cart, but the doctor took a great dale of blood from him, and he is now verra well whatever, though wakely on the legs. It would hev been a bad thing if Mr. McNicol was dead, for he will be verra good at pentin a door, and he haz between fifteen pounds and ten pounds in the bank at Stornoway, and four cows too and a cart, and he is a ferra religious man, and has

great skill o the psalm-tunes, and he toesna get trunk now more as twice or as three times in the two weeks. It was his dochter Betsy, a verra fine lass, that waz come to Borvabost, and it waz the talk among many that Alister-nan-Each he waz thinkin of makin up to her, but there will be a great laugh all over the island, and she will be verra angry and say she will not have him no if his house had a door of silfer to it for she will hev no one that toesna go to the Caithness fishins wi the other lads. It waz blew verra hard here the last night or two or three. There iss a great deal of salmon in the rivers; and Mr. Mackenzie he will be going across to Grimersta, the day after to-morrow, or the next day before that, and the English gentlemen hev been there more as two or three weeks, and they will be getting verra good sport whatever. Mairi she will be writen a letter to you to-morrow, Miss Sheila, and she will be telling you all the news of the house. Mairi waz sayin she will be goin to London when the harvest was got in, and Scarlett will say to her that no one will let her land on the island again if she toesna bring you back with her to the island and to your own house. If it waz not too much trouble, Miss Sheila, it would be a proud day for Scarlett if you waz send me a line or two lines to say if you will be coming to the Lews this summer or before the winter is over whatever. I remain, Honoured Mrs. Lavender, your obedient servant,

"DUNCAN MACDONALD."

"This summer or winter," said Sheila to herself, with a happy light on her face; "why not now?" Why should she not go downstairs to the coffee-room of the hotel, and place this invitation in the

hands of her husband and his friend? Would not its garrulous simplicity recall to both of them the island they used to find so pleasant? Would not they suddenly resolve to leave behind them London and its ways and people, even this monotonous sea out there, and speed away northward till they came in sight of the great and rolling Minch, with its majestic breadth of sky and its pale blue islands lying far away at the horizon? Then the happy landing at Stornoway—her father, and Duncan, and Mairi all on the quay—the rapid drive over to Loch Roag, and the first glimpse of the rocky bays, and clear water, and white sand about Borva and Borvabost! And Sheila would once more—having cast aside this cumbrous attire that she had to change so often, and having got out that neat and simple costume that was so good for walking, or driving, or sailing—be proud to wait upon her guests, and help Mairi in her household ways, and have a pretty table ready for the gentlemen when they returned from the shooting.

Her husband came up the hotel stairs and entered the room. She rose to meet him, with the open letter in her hand.

"Sheila," he said (and the light slowly died away from her face), "I have something to ask of you."

She knew by the sound of his voice that she had nothing to hope: it was not the first time she had been disappointed, and yet this time it seemed especially bitter somehow. The awakening from these illusions was sudden.

She did not answer, so he said, in the same measured voice—

"I have to ask that you will have henceforth no

communication with Mr. Ingram; I do not wish him to come to the house."

She stood for a moment, apparently not understanding the meaning of what he said. Then, when the full force of this decision and request came upon her, a quick colour sprang to her face—the cause of which, if it had been revealed to him in words, would have considerably astonished her husband. But the moment of doubt, of surprise, of inward indignation, was soon over. She cast down her eyes, and said meekly—

"Very well, dear."

It was now his turn to be astonished, and mortified as well. He could not have believed it possible that she should so calmly acquiesce in the dismissal of one of her dearest friends. He had expected a more or less angry protest, if not a distinct refusal, which would have given him an opportunity for displaying the injuries he conceived himself to have suffered at their hands. Why had she not come to himself? This man Ingram was presuming on his ancient friendship, and on the part he had taken in forwarding the marriage up in Borva. He had always, moreover, been somewhat too much of the schoolmaster—with his severe judgments, his sententious fashion of criticising and warning people, and his readiness to prove the whole world wrong in order to show himself to be right. All these and many other things Lavender meant to say to Sheila, so soon as she had protested against his forbidding Ingram to come any more to the house. But there was no protest. Sheila did not even seem surprised. She went back to her seat by the window, folded up Duncan's letter, and put it in her pocket; and then she turned to look at the sea.

Lavender regarded her for a moment, apparently doubting whether he should himself prosecute the subject; then he turned and left the room.

Sheila did not cry or otherwise seek to compassionate and console herself. Her husband had told her to do a certain thing; and she would do it. Perhaps she had been imprudent in having confided in Mr. Ingram; and, if so, it was right that she should be punished. But the regret and pain that lay deep in her heart was that Ingram should have suffered through her, and that she had no opportunity of telling him that, though they might not see each other, she would never forget her friendship for him, or cease to be grateful to him for his unceasing and generous kindness to her.

Next morning Lavender was summoned to London by a telegram which announced that his aunt was seriously ill. He and Sheila got ready at once, left by a forenoon train, had some brief luncheon at home, and then went down to see the old lady in Kensington Gore. During their journey, Lavender had been rather more courteous and kindly towards Sheila than was his wont. Was he pleased that she had so readily obeyed him in this matter of giving up about the only friend she had in London? Or was he moved by some visitation of compunction? Sheila tried to show that she was grateful for his kindness; but there was that between them which could not be removed by chance phrases or attentions. Mrs. Lavender was in her own room. Paterson brought word that she wanted to see Sheila first and alone; so Lavender sat down in the gloomy drawing-room by the window, and watched the people riding and driving past, and the sunshine on the dusty green trees in the Park.

"Is Frank Lavender below?" said the thin old woman, who was propped up in bed, with some scarlet garment around her that made her resemble more than ever the cockatoo of which Sheila had thought on first seeing her.

"Yes," said Sheila.

"I want to see you alone—I can't bear him dawdling about a room, and staring at things, and saying nothing. Does he speak to you?"

Sheila did not wish to enter into any controversy about the habits of her husband, so she said:

"I hope you will see him before he goes, Mrs. Lavender. He is very anxious to know how you are; and I am glad to find you looking so well. You do not look like an invalid at all."

"Oh, I'm not going to die yet," said the little dried old woman, with the harsh voice, the staring eyes, and the tightly-twisted grey hair. "I hope you didn't come to read the Bible to me—you wouldn't find one about in any case, I should think. If you like to sit down and read the sayings of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, I should enjoy that; but I suppose you are too busy thinking what dress you'll wear at my funeral."

"Indeed I was thinking of no such thing," said Sheila, indignantly, but feeling all the same that the hard, glittering, expressionless eyes were watching her.

"Do you think I believe you?" said Mrs. Lavender. "Bah! I hope I am able to recognize the facts of life. If you were to die this afternoon, I should get a black silk trimmed with crape the moment I got on my feet again, and go to your funeral in the ordinary way. I

hope you will pay me the same respect. Do you think I am afraid to speak of these things?"

"Why should you speak of them?" said Sheila, despairingly.

"Because it does you good to contemplate the worst that can befall you; and if it does not happen, you may rejoice. And it will happen. I know that I shall be lying in this bed, with a half-a-dozen of you round about trying to cry, and wondering which will have the courage to turn and go out of the room first. Then there will be the funeral day, and Paterson will be careful about the blinds, and go about the house on her tip-toes, as if I were likely to hear! Then there will be a pretty service up in the cemetery, and a man who never saw me will speak of his dear sister departed; and then you'll all go home and have your dinner. Am I afraid of it?——"

"Why should you talk like that?" said Sheila, piteously. "You are not going to die. You distress yourself and others by thinking of these horrible things——"

"My dear child, there is nothing horrible in nature. Everything is part of the universal system which you should recognize and accept. If you had trained yourself now, by the study of philosophical works, to know how helpless you are to alter the facts of life, and how it is the best wisdom to be prepared for the worst, you would find nothing horrible in thinking of your own funeral. You are not looking well."

Sheila was startled by the suddenness of the announcement.

"Perhaps I am a little tired with the travelling we have done to-day."

"Is Frank Lavender kind to you?"

What was she to say, with those two eyes scanning her face?

"It is too soon to expect him to be anything else," she said, with an effort at a smile.

"Ah! So you are beginning to talk in that way? I thought you were full of sentimental notions of life when you came to London. It is not a good place for nurturing such things."

"It is not," said Sheila, surprised into a sigh.

"Come nearer. Don't be afraid I shall bite you. I am not so ferocious as I look."

Sheila rose and went closer to the bedside; and the old woman stretched out a lean and withered hand to her.

"If I thought that that silly fellow wasn't behaving well to you——"

"I will not listen to you," said Sheila, suddenly withdrawing her hand, while a quick colour leapt to her face; "I will not listen to you if you speak of my husband in that way."

"I will speak of him any way you like. Don't get into a rage. I have known Frank Lavender a good deal longer than you have. What I was going to say is this—that if I thought that he was not behaving well to you, I would play him a trick. I would leave my money, which is all he has got to live on, to you; and when I died he would find himself dependent on you for every farthing he wanted to spend."

And the old woman laughed—with very little of the weakness of an invalid in the look of her face. But Sheila, when she had mastered her surprise, and resolved not to be angry, said calmly—

"Whatever I have, whatever I might have, that belongs to my husband, not to me."

"Now you speak like a sensible girl," said Mrs. Lavender. "That is the misfortune of a wife, that she cannot keep her own money to herself. But there are means by which the law may be defeated, my dear. I have been thinking it over; I have been speaking of it to Mr. Ingram; for I have suspected for some time that my nephew, Mr. Frank, was not behaving himself."

"Mrs. Lavender," said Sheila, with a face too proud and indignant for tears, "you do not understand me. No one has the right to imagine anything against my husband, and to seek to punish him through me. And when I said that everything that I have belongs to him, I was not thinking of the law—no—but only this: that everything that I have, or might have, would belong to him, as I myself belong to him, of my own free will and gift; and I would have no money, or anything else that was not entirely his."

"You are a fool."

"Perhaps," said Sheila, struggling to repress her tears.

"What if I were to leave every farthing of my property to a hospital? Where would Frank Lavender be then?"

"He could earn his own living without any such help," said Sheila, proudly: for she had never yet given up the hope that her husband would fulfil the fair promise of an earlier time, and win great renown for himself in striving to please her, as he had many a time vowed he would do.

"He has taken great care to conceal his powers in that way," said the old woman, with a sneer.

"And if he has, whose fault is it?" the girl said, warmly. "Who has kept him in idleness but yourself?

And now you blame him for it. I wish he had never had any of your money—I wish he were never to have any more of it——"

And then Sheila stopped, with a terrible dread falling over her. What had she not said? The pride of her race had carried her so far, and she had given expression to all the tumult of her heart; but had she not betrayed her duty as a wife, and grievously compromised the interests of her husband? And yet the indignation in her bosom was too strong to admit of her retracting those fatal phrases, and begging forgiveness. She stood for a moment, irresolute; and she knew that the invalid was regarding her curiously, as though she were some wild animal, and not an ordinary resident in Bayswater.

"You are a little mad, but you are a good girl, and I want to be friends with you. You have in you the spirit of a dozen Frank Lavenders."

"You will never make friends with me by speaking ill of my husband," said Sheila, with the same proud and indignant look.

"Not when he ill-uses you?"

"He does not ill-use me. What has Mr. Ingram been saying to you?"

The sudden question would certainly have brought about a disclosure, if any were to have been made; but Mrs. Lavender assured Sheila that Mr. Ingram had told her nothing, that she had been forming her own conclusions, and that she still doubted that they were right.

"Now sit down and read to me. You will find Marcus Aurelius on the top of those books."

"Frank is in the drawing-room," observed Sheila, mildly.

"He can wait," said the old woman, sharply.

"Yes, but you cannot expect me to keep him waiting," with a smile which did not conceal her very definite purpose.

"Then ring, and bid him come up. You will soon get rid of those absurd sentiments."

Sheila rang the bell, and sent Mrs. Paterson down for Lavender; but she did not betake herself to Marcus Aurelius. She waited a few minutes, and then her husband made his appearance, whereupon she sat down, and left to him the agreeable duty of talking with this toothless old heathen about funerals and lingering death.

"Well, Aunt Lavender, I am sorry to hear you have been ill, but I suppose you are getting all right again, to judge by your looks."

"I am not nearly as ill as you expected."

"I wonder you did not say 'hoped'!" remarked Lavender, carelessly. "You are always attributing the most charitable feelings to your fellow-creatures."

"Frank Lavender," said the old lady, who was a little pleased by this bit of flattery, "if you came here to make yourself impertinent and disagreeable, you can go downstairs again. Your wife and I get on very well without you."

"I am glad to hear it," he said; "I suppose you have been telling her what is the matter with you."

"I have not. I don't know. I have had a pain in the head, and two fits, and I dare say the next will carry me off. The doctors won't tell me anything about it, so I suppose it is serious——"

"Nonsense!" cried Lavender. "Serious! To look at you, one would say you never had been ill in your life."

"Don't tell stories, Frank Lavender. I know I look like a corpse; but I don't mind it, for I avoid the looking-glass, and keep the spectacle for my friends. I expect the next fit will kill me."

"I'll tell you what it is, Aunt Lavender; if you would only get up and come with us for a drive in the Park, you would find there was nothing of an invalid about you; and we should take you home to a quiet dinner at Notting Hill, and Sheila would sing to you all the evening, and to-morrow you would receive the doctors in state in your drawing-room, and tell them you were going for a month to Malvern."

"Your husband has a fine imagination, my dear," said Mrs. Lavender to Sheila. "It is a pity he puts it to no use. Now I shall let both of you go. Three breathing in this room are too many for the cubic feet of air it contains. Frank, bring over those scales and put them on the table; and send Paterson to me as you go out."

And so they went downstairs, and out of the house. Just as they stood on the steps, looking for a hansom, a young lad came forward, and shook hands with Lavender, glancing rather nervously at Sheila.

"Well, Mosenberg," said Lavender, "you've come back from Leipsic at last. We got your card when we came home this morning from Brighton. Let me introduce you to my wife."

The boy looked at the beautiful face before him with something of distant wonder and reverence in his regard. Sheila had heard of the lad before—of the Mendelssohn that was to be—and liked his appearance at first sight. He was a rather handsome boy of fourteen or fifteen, of the fair Jew type, with large, dark expressive eyes, and long, wavy, light-brown hair.

He spoke English fluently and well; his slight German accent was, indeed, scarcely so distinct as Sheila's Highland one; the chief peculiarity of his speaking being a preference for short sentences, as if he were afraid to venture upon elaborate English. He had not addressed a dozen sentences to Sheila before she had begun to have a liking for the lad; perhaps on account of his soft and musical voice; perhaps on account of the respectful and almost wondering admiration that dwelt in his eyes. He spoke to her as if she were some saint, who had but to smile to charm and bewilder the humble worshipper at her shrine.

"I was intending to call upon Mrs. Lavender, Madame," he said. "I heard that she was ill. Perhaps you can tell me if she is better."

"She seems to be very well to-day, and in very good spirits," Sheila answered.

"Then I will not go in. Did you propose to take a walk in the Park, Madame?"

Lavender inwardly laughed at the magnificent audacity of the lad; and, seeing that Sheila hesitated, humoured him by saying—

"Well, we were thinking of calling on one or two people before going home to dinner. But I haven't seen you for a long time, Mosenberg; and I want you to tell me how you succeeded at the Conservatoire. If you like to walk with us for a bit, we can give you something to eat at seven."

"That would be very pleasant for me," said the boy, blushing somewhat, "if it does not incommode you, Madame."

"Oh, no—I hope you will come," said Sheila, most heartily; and so they set out for a walk through Kensington Gardens northward.

Precious little did Lavender learn about Leipsic during that walk. The boy devoted himself wholly to Sheila. He had heard frequently of her, and he knew of her coming from the wild and romantic Hebrides; and he began to tell her of all the experiments that composers had made in representing the sound of seas, and storms, and winds howling through caverns washed by the waves. Lavender liked music well enough, and could himself play and sing a little; but this enthusiasm rather bored him. He wanted to know if the yellow wine was still as cool and clear as ever down in the twilight of Auerbach's cellar, what burlesques had lately been played at the theatre, and whether such and such a beer-garden was still to the fore; whereas he heard only analyses of overtures, and descriptions of the uses of particular musical instruments, and a wild rhapsody about moonlit seas, the sweetness of French horns, the King of Thule, and a dozen other matters.

"Mosenberg," he said, "before you go calling on people, you ought to visit an English tailor. People will think you belong to a German band."

"I have been to a tailor," said the lad, with a frank laugh. "My parents, Madame, wish me to be quite English—that is why I am sent to live in London, while they are in Frankfort. I stay with some good friends of mine, who are very musical, and they are not annoyed by my practising, as other people would be."

"I hope you will sing something to us this evening," said Sheila.

"I will sing and play for you all the evening," he said lightly, "until you are tired. But you must tell me when you are tired; for who can tell how much

music will be enough? Sometimes two or three songs are more than enough to make people wish you away."

"You need have no fear of tiring me," said Sheila. "But when you are tired, I will sing for you."

"Yes, of course you sing, Madame," he said, casting down his eyes; "I knew that when I saw you."

Sheila had got a sweetheart; and Lavender saw it, and smiled good-naturedly. The awe and reverence with which this lad regarded the beautiful woman beside him were something new and odd in Kensington Gardens. Yet it was the way of those boys. He had himself had his imaginative fits of worship, in which some very ordinary young woman, who ate a good breakfast, and spent an hour and a half in arranging her hair before going out, was regarded as some beautiful goddess fresh risen from the sea, or descended from the clouds. Young Mosenberg was just at the proper age for these foolish dreams. He would sing songs to Sheila, and reveal to her that way of passion of which he dare not otherwise speak. He would compose pieces of music for her, and dedicate them to her, and spend half his quarterly money in having them printed. He would grow to consider him, Lavender, a heartless brute, and cherish dark notions of poisoning him, but for the pain it might cause to her.

"I don't remember whether you smoke, Mosenberg," Lavender said, after dinner.

"Yes—a cigarette sometimes," said the lad; "but if Mrs. Lavender is going away, perhaps she will let me go into the drawing-room with her. There is that sonata of Muzio Clementi, Madame, which I will try to remember for you, if you please——"

"All right," said Lavender; "you'll find me in the

next room on the left when you get tired of your music and want a cigar. I think you used to beat me at chess, didn't you?"

"I do not know. We will try once more to-night."

Then Sheila and he went into the drawing-room by themselves; and while she took a seat near the empty fire-place, he opened the piano at once, and sat down. He turned up his cuffs. He took a look at the pedals. He threw back his head, shaking his long brown hair. And then, with a crash like thunder, his two hands struck the keys. He had forgotten all about that sonata—it was a fantasia of his own, based on the airs in "Der Freischütz," that he played; and, as he played, Sheila's poor little piano suffered somewhat. Never before had it been so battered about; and she wished the small chamber were a great hall, to temper the voluminous noise of this opening passage. But presently the music softened. The white, lithe fingers ran lightly over the keys, so that the notes seemed to ripple out like the prattling of a stream; and then again some stately and majestic air, or some joyous burst of song, would break upon this light accompaniment, and lead up to another roar and rumble of noise. It was a very fine performance, doubtless; but what Sheila remarked most was the enthusiasm of the lad. She was to see more of that.

"Now," he said, "that is nothing. It is to get one's fingers accustomed to the keys—you play anything that is loud and rapid. But if you please, Madame, shall I sing you something?"

"Yes, do," said Sheila.

"I will sing for you a little German song, which I believe Jenny Lind used to sing, but I never heard her sing. You know German?"

"Very little indeed."

"This is only the cry of some one, who is far away, about his sweetheart. It is very simple, both in the words and the music."

And he began to sing, in a voice so rich, so tender, and expressive, that Sheila sat amazed and bewildered to hear him. Where had this boy caught such a trick of passion, or was it really a trick that threw into his voice all the pathos of a strong man's love and grief? He had a powerful baritone, of unusual compass, and rare sweetness; but it was not the finely-trained art of his singing, but the passionate abandonment of it, that thrilled Sheila, and indeed brought tears to her eyes. How had this mere lad learned all the yearning and despair of love, that he sang—

"Dir bebt die Brust,
Dir schlägt dies Herz
Du meine Lust!
O du, mein Schmerz!
Nur an den Winden, den Sternen der Höh
Muss ich verkünden mein süsses Weh!"

as though his heart were breaking? When he had finished, he paused for a moment or two before leaving the piano; and then he came over to where Sheila sat. She fancied there was a strange look on his face, as of one who had been really experiencing the wild emotions of which he sang; but he said, in his ordinary careful way of speaking—

"Madame, I am sorry I cannot translate the words for you into English. They are too simple; and they have, what is common in many German songs, a mingling of the pleasure and the sadness of being in love, that would not read natural perhaps in English. When he says to her that she is his greatest delight, and also his greatest grief, it is quite right in the German—but not in the English."

"But where have you learned all these things?" she said to him, talking to him as if he were a mere child, and looking without fear into his handsome boyish face and fine eyes. "Sit down and tell me. That is the song of some one whose sweetheart is far away, you said. But you sang it as if you yourself had some sweetheart far away."

"So I have, Madame," he said, seriously; "when I sing the song, I think of her then, so that I almost cry for her."

"And who is she?" said Sheila, gently. "Is she very far away?"

"I do not know," said the lad, absently. "I do not know who she is. Sometimes I think she is a beautiful woman away at St. Petersburg, singing in the opera-house there. Or I think she has sailed away in a ship from me——"

"But you do not sing about any particular person?" said Sheila, with an innocent wonder appearing in her eyes.

"Oh no, not at all," said the boy; and then he added, with some suddenness, "Do you think, Madame, any fine songs like that, or any fine words, that go to the heart of people, are written about any one person? Oh, no! The man has a great desire in him to say something beautiful, or sad, and he says it—not to one person, but to all the world; and all the world takes it from him as a gift. Sometimes, yes, he will think of one woman, or he will dedicate the music to her, or he will compose it for her wedding, but the feeling in his heart is greater than any that he has for her. Can you believe, Madame, that Mendelssohn wrote the Hochzeitm—the Wedding-March—for any one wedding? No. It was all the marriage-joy of all

the world he put into his music, and everyone knows that. And you hear it at this wedding, at that wedding, but you know it belongs to something far away and more beautiful than the marriage of any one bride with her sweetheart. And if you will pardon me, Madame, for speaking about myself; it is about some one I never knew, who is far more beautiful and precious to me than any one I ever knew, that I try to think when I sing these sad songs, and then I think of her far away, and not likely ever to see me again."

"But some day, you will find that you have met her in real life," Sheila said. "And you will find her far more beautiful and kind to you than anything you dreamed about; and you will try to write your best music to give her. And then, if you should be unhappy, you will find how much worse is the real unhappiness about one you love than the sentiment of a song you can lay aside at any moment."

The lad looked at her.

"What can you know about unhappiness, Madame?" he said, with a frank and gentle simplicity that she liked.

"I?" said Sheila. "When people get married and begin to experience the cares of the world, they must expect to be unhappy sometimes."

"But not you," he said, with some touch of protest in his voice, as if it were impossible the world should deal harshly with so young, and beautiful, and tender a creature. "You can have nothing but enjoyment around you. Everyone must try to please you. You need only condescend to speak to people, and they are grateful to you for a great favour. Perhaps, Madame, you think I am impertinent——"

He stopped and blushed; while Sheila herself, with a little touch of colour, answered him, that she hoped he would always speak to her quite frankly, and then suggested that he might sing once more for her.

"Very well," he said, as he sat down to the piano; "this is not any more a sad song. It is about a young lady who will not let her sweetheart kiss her, except on conditions. You shall hear the conditions, and what he says."

Sheila began to wonder whether this innocent-eyed lad had been imposing on her. The song was acted as well as sung. It consisted chiefly of a dialogue between the two lovers; and the boy, with a wonderful ease and grace and skill, mimicked the shy coquetries of the girl, her fits of petulance and dictation, and the pathetic remonstrances of her companion, his humble entreaties, and his final sullenness, which is only conquered by her sudden and ample consent. "What a rare faculty of artistic representation this precocious boy must have," she thought, "if he really exhibits all those moods, and whims, and tricks of manner without having himself been in the position of the despairing and imploring lover!"

"You were not thinking of the beautiful lady in St. Petersburg when you were singing now," Sheila said, on his coming back to her.

"Oh no," he said carelessly; "that is nothing. You have not to imagine anything. These people, you see them on every stage, in the comedies and farces."

"But that might happen in actual life," said Sheila, still not quite sure about him. "Do you know that many people would think you must have yourself been teased in that way, or you could not imitate it so naturally?"

"I! Oh no, Madame," he said, seriously, "I should not act that way, if I were in love with a woman. If I found her a comedy-actress, liking to make her amusement out of our relations, I should say to her, '*Good evening, Mademoiselle; we have both made a little mistake.*'"

"But you might be so much in love with her that you could not leave her without being very miserable."

"I might be very much in love with her, yes: but I would rather go away, and be miserable, than be humiliated by such a girl. Why do you smile, Madame? Do you think I am vain, or that I am too young to know anything about that? Perhaps both are true; but one cannot help thinking."

"Well," said Sheila, with a grandly maternal air of sympathy and interest, "you must always remember this—that you have something more important to attend to than merely looking out for a beautiful sweetheart. That is the fancy of a foolish girl. You have your profession; and you must become great and famous in that; and then, some day, when you meet this beautiful woman, and ask her to be your wife, she will be bound to do that, and you will confer honour on her as well as secure happiness to yourself. Now, if you were to fall in love with some coquettish girl like her you were singing about, you would have no ambition to become famous; you would lose all interest in everything except her, and she would be able to make you miserable by a single word. When you have made a name for yourself, and got a good many more years, you will be better able to bear anything that happens to you in your love or in your marriage."

"You are very kind to take so much trouble,"

said young Mosenberg, looking up with big, grateful eyes. "Perhaps, Madame, if you are not very busy, during the day, you will let me call in sometimes; and if there is no one here, I will tell you about what I am doing, and play for you, or sing for you, if you please."

"In the afternoons I am always free," she said.

"Do you never go out," he asked.

"Not often. My husband is at his studio most of the day."

The boy looked at her, hesitated for a moment, and then, with a sudden rush of colour to his face—

"You should not stay so much in the house. Will you sometimes go for a little walk with me, Madame, to Kensington Gardens, if you are not busy in the afternoon?"

"Oh, certainly," said Sheila, without a moment's embarrassment. "Do you live near them?"

"No, I live in Sloane-street; but the underground railway brings me here in a very short time."

The mention of Sloane-street gave a twinge to Sheila's heart. Ought she to have been so ready to accept offers of new friendship just as her old friend had been banished from her?

"In Sloane-street? Do you know Mr. Ingram?"

"Oh yes, very well. Do you?"

"He is one of my oldest friends," said Sheila, bravely: she would not acknowledge that their intimacy was a thing of the past.

"He is a very good friend to me—I know that," said young Mosenberg, with a laugh. "He hired a piano, merely because I used to go into his rooms at night; and now he makes me play over all my most difficult music when I go in, and he sits and smokes

a pipe, and pretends to like it. I do not think he does; but I have got to do it all the same; and then, afterwards, I sing for him some songs that I know he likes. Madame, I think I can surprise you."

He went suddenly to the piano, and began to sing, in a very quiet way—

"O soft be thy slumbers, by Tigh-na-linne's waters,
Thy late-wake was sung by MacDiarmid's fair daughters,
But far in Lochaber the true heart was weeping,
Whose hopes are entombed in the grave where thou'rt sleeping."

It was the lament of the young girl whose lover had been separated from her by false reports, and who died before he could get back to Lochaber when the deception was discovered. And the wild, sad air that the girl is supposed to sing seemed so strange with those new chords that this boy-musician gave it, that Sheila sat and listened to it as though it were the sound of the seas about Borva coming to her with a new voice and finding her altered and a stranger.

"I know nearly all of those Highland songs that Mr. Ingram has got," said the lad.

"I did not know he had any," Sheila said.

"Sometimes he tries to sing one himself," said the boy, with a smile, "but he does not sing very well, and he gets vexed with himself in fun, and flings things about the room. But you will sing some of those songs, Madame, and let me hear how they are sung in the North?"

"Some time," said Sheila; "I would rather listen just now to all you can tell me about Mr. Ingram—he is such a very old friend of mine, and I do not know how he lives."

The lad speedily discovered that there was at least one way of keeping his new and beautiful acquaintance profoundly interested; and, indeed, he went on

talking until Lavender came into the room, in evening dress. It was eleven o'clock; and young Mosenberg started up with a thousand apologies and hopes that he had not detained Mrs. Lavender. No, Mrs. Lavender was not going out; her husband was going round for an hour to a ball that Mrs. Kavanagh was giving, but she preferred to stay at home.

"May I call upon you to-morrow afternoon, Madame?" said the boy, as he was leaving.

"I shall be very glad if you will," Sheila answered.

And as he went along the pavement, young Mosenberg observed to his companion that Mrs. Lavender did not seem to have gone out much, and that it was very good of her to have promised to go with him occasionally into Kensington Gardens.

"Oh, has she?" said Lavender.

"Yes," said the lad, with some surprise.

"You are lucky to be able to get her to leave the house," her husband said; "I can't."

Perhaps he had not tried so much as the words seemed to imply.

CHAPTER III.

Guesses.

"MR. INGRAM," cried young Mosenberg, bursting into the room of his friend, "do you know that I have seen your Princess from the island of the Atlantic? Yes, I met her yesterday, and I went up to the house, and I dined there, and spent all the evening there."

Ingram was not surprised, nor, apparently, much interested. He was cutting open the leaves of a

quarterly review, and a freshly-filled pipe lay on the table beside him. A fire had been lit, more for cheerfulness than warmth: the shutters were shut; there was some whisky on the table; so that this small apartment seemed to have its share of bachelor's comforts.

"Well," said Ingram, quietly, "did you play for her?"

"Yes."

"And sing for her, too?"

"Yes."

"Did you play and sing your very best for her?"

"Yes, I did. But I have not told you half yet. This afternoon I went up; and she went out for a walk with me; and we went down through Kensington Gardens, and all around by the Serpentine——"

"Did she go into that parade of people?" said Ingram, looking up with some surprise.

"No," said the lad, looking rather crestfallen, for he would have liked to have shown off Sheila to some of his friends; "she would not go—she preferred to watch the small boats on the Serpentine; and she was very kind, too, in speaking to the children, and helping them with their boats, although some people stared at her. And what is more than all these things, to-morrow night she comes with me to a concert in the St. James's Hall—yes."

"You are very fortunate," said Ingram, with a smile, for he was well pleased to hear that Sheila had taken a fancy to the boy, and was likely to find his society amusing. "But you have not told me yet what you think of her."

"What I think of her!" said the lad, pausing in a bewildered way, as if he could find no words to express

his opinion of Sheila. And then he said, suddenly, "*I think she is like the Mother of God.*"

"You irreverent young rascal!" said Ingram, lighting his pipe, "how dare you say such a thing?"

"I mean in the pictures—in the tall pictures you see in some churches abroad, far up in a half-darkness. She has the same sweet, compassionate look, and her eyes are sometimes a little sad; and when she speaks to you, you think you have known her for a long time, and that she wishes to be very kind to you. But she is not a Princess at all, as you told me. I expected to find her grand, haughty, wilful, yes; but she is much too friendly for that, and when she laughs, you see she could not sweep about a room, and stare at people. But if she was angry, or proud—perhaps then——"

"See you don't make her angry, then," said Ingram. "Now go and play over all you were practising in the morning. No!—stop a bit. Sit down and tell me something more about your experiences of Shei—of Mrs. Lavender."

Young Mosenberg laughed, and sat down.

"Do you know, Mr. Ingram, that the same thing occurred yesterday night, I was about to sing some more, or I was asking Mrs. Lavender to sing some more—I forget which—but she said to me, '*Not just now. I wish you to sit down and tell me all you know about Mr. Ingram.*'"

"And she no sooner honours you with her confidence than you carry it to everyone!" said Ingram, somewhat fearful of the boy's tongue.

"Oh, as to that," said the lad, delighted to see that his friend was a little embarrassed. "As to that, I believe she is in love with you."

"Mosenberg," said Ingram, with a flash of anger in his dark eyes, "if you were half-a-dozen years older, I would thrash the life out of you. Do you think that is a pretty sort of joke to make about a woman? Don't you know the mischief your gabbling tongue might make; for how is everyone to know that you are talking merely impertinent nonsense?"

"Oh," said the boy, audaciously, "I did not mean anything of the kind you see in comedies or in operas, breaking up marriages, and causing duels! Oh, no. I think she is in love with you as I am in love with her: and I am, ever since yesterday."

"Well, I will say this for you," remarked Ingram, slowly, "that you are the cheekiest young beggar I have the pleasure to know. You are in love with her, are you? A lady admits you to her house, is particularly kind to you, talks to you in confidence, and then you go and tell people that you are in love with her!"

"I did not tell people so," said Mosenberg, flushing under the severity of the reproof; "I told you only, and I thought you would understand what I meant. I should have told Lavender himself just as soon, yes! —only he would not care."

"How do you know?"

"Bah!" said the boy, impatiently. "Cannot one see it? You have a pretty wife—much prettier than anyone you would see at a ball at Mrs. Kavanagh's—and you leave her at home, and you go to the ball to amuse yourself."

This boy, Ingram perceived, was getting to see too clearly how matters stood. He bade him go and play some music, having first admonished him gravely about the necessity of keeping some watch and ward over

his tongue. Then the pipe was re-lit; and a fury of sound arose at the other end of the room.

So Lavender, forgetful of the true-hearted girl who loved him, forgetful of his own generous instincts, forgetful of the future that his fine abilities promised, was still dangling after this alien woman; and Sheila was left at home, with her troubles and piteous yearnings and fancies as her only companions. Once upon a time, Ingram could have gone straight up to him, and admonished him, and driven him to amend his ways. But now that was impossible.

What was still possible? One wild project occurred to him for a moment, but he laughed at it, and dismissed it. It was that he should go boldly to Mrs. Lorraine herself, ask her plainly if she knew what cruel injury she was doing to this young wife, and force her to turn Lavender adrift. But what enterprise of the days of old romance could be compared with this mad proposal? To ride up to a castle, blow a trumpet, and announce that unless a certain lady were released forthwith, death and destruction would begin—all that was simple enough, easy and according to rule; but to go into a lady's drawing-room, without an introduction, and request her to stop a certain flirtation—that was a much more awful undertaking. But Ingram could not altogether dismiss this notion from his head. Mosenberg went on playing no longer his practising-pieces, but all manner of airs which he knew Ingram liked; while the small sallow man with the brown beard lay in his easy-chair, and smoked his pipe, and gazed attentively at his toes on the fender.

"You know Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter, don't you, Mosenberg?" he said, during an interval in the music.

"Not much," said the boy. "They were in England only a little while before I went to Leipsic."

"I should like to know them."

"That is very easy. Mr. Lavender will introduce you to them. Mrs. Lavender said he went there very much."

"What would they do, do you think, if I went up and asked to see them!"

"The servant would ask if it was about beer or coals that you called."

A man will do much for a woman who is his friend; but to be suspected of being a brewer's traveller, to have to push one's way into a strange drawing-room, to have to confront the awful stare of the inmates, and then to have to deliver a message which they will probably consider as the very extreme of audacious and meddling impertinence! The prospect was not pleasant; and yet Ingram, as he sat and thought over it that evening, finally resolved to encounter all these dangers and wounds. He could help Sheila in no other way. He was banished from her house. Perhaps he might induce this American girl to release her captive, and give Lavender back to his own wife. What were a few twinges of one's self-respect, or risks of a humiliating failure, compared with the possibility of befriending Sheila in some small way?

Next morning he went early in to Whitehall; and about one o'clock started off for Holland Park. He wore a tall hat, a black frock-coat, and yellow kid gloves. He went in a hansom, so that the person who opened the door should know that he was not a brewer's traveller. In this wise he reached Mrs. Kavanagh's house, which Lavender had frequently

pointed out to him in passing, about half-past one, and, with some internal tremors, but much outward calmness, went up the broad stone steps.

A small boy in buttons opened the door.

"Is Mrs. Lorraine at home?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy.

It was the simplest thing in the world. In a couple of seconds he found himself in a big drawing-room; and the youth had taken his card upstairs. Ingram was not very sure whether his success, so far, was due to the hansom, or to his tall hat, or to a silver-headed cane which his grandfather had brought home from India. However, here he was in the house, just like the hero of one of those fine old farces of our youth, who jumps from the street into a strange drawing-room, flirts with the maid, hides behind a screen, confronts the master, and marries his daughter all in half an hour, the most exacting unities of time and place being faithfully observed.

Presently the door was opened, and a young lady, pale and calm and sweet of face, approached him, and not only bowed to him, but held out her hand.

"I have much pleasure in making your acquaintance, Mr. Ingram," she said, gently, and somewhat slowly. "Mr. Lavender has frequently promised to bring you to see us; for he has spoken to us so much about you, that we had begun to think we already knew you. Will you come with me upstairs that I may introduce you to Mamma?"

Ingram had come prepared to state harsh truths bluntly, and was ready to meet any sort of anger or opposition with a perfect frankness of intention. But he certainly had not come prepared to find the smart-tongued and fascinating American widow of whom he

had heard so much, a quiet, self-possessed, and gracious young lady, of singularly winning manners, and clear and resolutely honest eyes. Had Lavender been quite accurate or even conscientious in his garrulous talk about Mrs. Lorraine?

"If you will excuse me," said Ingram, with a smile that had less of embarrassment about it than he could have expected, "I would rather speak to you for a few minutes first. The fact is, I have come on a self-imposed errand; and that must be my apology for—for thrusting myself——"

"I am sure no apology is needed," said the girl. "We have always been expecting to see you. Will you sit down?"

He put his hat and his cane on the table; and as he did so, he recorded a mental resolution not to be led away by the apparent innocence and sweetness of this woman. What a fool he had been, to expect her to appear in the guise of some forward and giggling coquette, as if Frank Lavender, with all his faults, could have suffered anything like coarseness of manners! But was this woman any the less dangerous that she was refined and courteous, and had the speech and bearing of a gentlewoman?

"Mrs. Lorraine," he said, lowering his eyebrows somewhat, "I may as well be frank with you. I have come upon an unpleasant errand—an affair, indeed, which ought to be no business of mine; but sometimes, when you care a little for some one, you don't mind running the risk of being treated as an intermeddler. You know that I know Mrs. Lavender. She is an old friend of mine. She was almost a child when I knew her first; and I still have a sort of no-

tion that she is a child, and that I should look after her, and so—and so——"

She sat quite still. There was no surprise, no alarm, no anger, when Sheila's name was mentioned. She was merely attentive; but now, seeing that he hesitated, she said—

"I do not know what you have to say; but if it is serious, may not I ask Mamma to join us?"

"If you please, no. I would rather speak with you alone, as this matter concerns yourself only. Well, the fact is, I have seen for some time back that Mrs. Lavender is very unhappy; she is left alone; she knows no one in London; perhaps she does not care to join much in those social amusements that her husband enjoys. I say this poor girl is an old friend of mine; I cannot help trying to do something to make her less wretched; and so I have ventured to come to you to see if you could not assist me. Mr. Lavender comes very much to your house; and Sheila is left all by herself; and doubtless she begins to fancy that her husband is neglectful, perhaps indifferent to her, and may get to imagine things that are quite wrong, you know, and that could be explained away by a little kindness on your part."

Was this, then, the fashion in which Jonah had gone up to curse the wickedness of Nineveh? As he had spoken, he had been aware that those sincere, somewhat matter-of-fact, and far from unfriendly eyes that were fixed on him had undergone no change whatever. Here was no vile creature who would start up, with a guilty conscience, to repel the remotest hint of an accusation; and indeed, quite unconsciously to himself, he had been led on to ask for her help. Not that he feared her. Not that he could

not have said the harshest things to her which there was any reason for saying. But somehow there seemed to be no occasion for the utterance of any cruel truths.

The wonder of it was, too, that instead of being wounded, indignant, and angry, as he had expected her to be, she betrayed a very friendly interest in Sheila, as though she herself had nothing whatever to do with the matter.

"You have undertaken a very difficult task, Mr. Ingram," she said, with a smile. "I don't think there are many married ladies in London who have a friend who would do as much for them. And, to tell you the truth, both my mamma and myself have come to the same conclusion as yourself about Mr. Lavender. It is really too bad, the way in which he allows that pretty young thing to remain at home; for I suppose she would go more into society if he were to coax her and persuade her. We have done what we could, in sending her invitations, in calling on her, and in begging Mr. Lavender to bring her with him. But he has always some excuse for her, so that we never see her. And yet I am sure he does not mean to give her pain; for he is very proud of her, and madly extravagant wherever she is concerned, and sometimes he takes sudden fits of trying to please her and be kind to her that are quite odd in their way. Can you tell me what we should do?"

Ingram looked at her for a moment, and said, gravely and slowly—

"Before we talk any more about that, I must clear my conscience. I believe that I have done you a wrong. I came here prepared to accuse you of drawing away Mr. Lavender from his wife, of seeking

amusement and perhaps some social distinction by keeping him continually dangling after you; and I meant to reproach you, or even threaten you, until you promised never to see him again."

A quick flush, partly of shame and partly of annoyance, sprang to the fair and pale face; but she answered, calmly—

"It is perhaps as well that you did not tell me this a few minutes ago. May I ask what has led you to change your opinion of me, if it has changed?"

"Of course it has changed," he said, promptly and emphatically. "I can see that I did you a great injury; and I apologize for it, and beg your forgiveness. But when you ask me what has led me to change my opinion, what am I to say? Your manner, perhaps, more than what you have said, has convinced me that I was wrong."

"Perhaps you are again mistaken," she said, coldly; "you get rapidly to conclusions."

"The reproof is just," he said. "You are quite right. I have made a blunder; there is no mistake about it."

"But do you think it was fair," she said, with some spirit, "do you think it was fair to believe all this harm about a woman you had never seen? Now, listen. A hundred times I have begged Mr. Lavender to be more attentive to his wife—not in these words, of course, but as directly as I could. Mamma has given parties, made arrangements for visits, drives, and all sorts of things, to tempt Mrs. Lavender to come to us, and all in vain. Of course, you can't thrust yourself on anyone like that. Though Mamma and myself like Mrs. Lavender very well, it is asking too much

that we should encounter the humiliation of intermeddling——"

Here she stopped suddenly, with the least show of embarrassment. Then she said, frankly—

"You are an old friend of hers. It is very good of you to have risked so much for the sake of that girl. There are very few gentlemen whom one meets who would do as much."

Ingram could say nothing, and was a little impatient with himself. Was he to be first reproved, and then treated with an indulgent kindness, by a mere girl?

"Mamma," said Mrs. Lorraine, as an elderly lady entered the room, "let me introduce to you Mr. Ingram, whom you must already know. He proposes we should join in some conspiracy to inveigle Mrs. Lavender into society, and make the poor little thing amuse herself."

"Little!" said Mrs. Kavanagh, with a smile; "she is a good deal taller than you are, my dear. But I am afraid, Mr. Ingram, you have undertaken a hopeless task. Will you stay to luncheon, and talk it over with us?"

"I hope you will," said Mrs. Lorraine; and naturally enough he consented.

Luncheon was just ready. As they were going into the room on the opposite side of the hall, the younger lady said to Ingram, in a quiet undertone, but with much indifference of manner—

"You know, if you think I ought to give up Mr. Lavender's acquaintance, I will do so at once. But perhaps that will not be necessary."

So this was the house in which Sheila's husband spent so much of his time; and these were the two

ladies of whom so much had been said and surmised. There were three of Lavender's pictures on the walls of the dining-room; and as Ingram inadvertently glanced at them, Mrs. Lorraine said to him—

"Don't you think it is a pity Mr. Lavender should continue drawing those imaginative sketches of heads? I do not think, myself, that he does himself justice in that way. Some bits of landscape, now, that I have seen, seemed to me to have quite a definite character about them, and promised far more than anything else of his I have seen."

"That is precisely what I think," said Ingram, partly amused and partly annoyed to find that this girl, with her clear grey eyes, her soft and musical voice, and her singular delicacy of manner, had an evil trick of saying the very things he would himself have said, and leaving him with nothing but a helpless "yes."

"I think he ought to have given up his club when he married. Most English gentlemen do that when they marry, do they not?" said Mrs. Kavanagh.

"Some," said Ingram. "But a good deal of nonsense is talked about the influence of clubs in that way. It is really absurd to suppose that the size or the shape of a building can alter a man's moral character——"

"It does, though," said Mrs. Lorraine, confidently. "I can tell directly if a gentleman has been accustomed to spend his time in clubs. When he is surprised, or angry, or impatient, you can perceive blanks in his conversation, which in a club, I suppose, would be filled up. Don't you know poor old Colonel Hannen's way of talking, Mamma? This old gentleman, Mr. Ingram, is very fond of speaking to you about

political liberty, and the rights of conscience; and he generally becomes so confused that he gets vexed with himself, and makes odd pauses, as if he were invariably addressing himself in very rude language indeed. Sometimes you would think he was like a railway-engine, going blindly and helplessly on through a thick and choaking mist; and you can see that, if there were no ladies present, he would let off a few crackers—fog-signals, as it were—just to bring himself up a bit, and let people know where he was. Then he will go on again, talking away, until you fancy yourself in a tunnel, with a throbbing noise in your ears, and all the daylight shut out, and you perhaps getting to wish that on the whole you were dead."

"Cecilia!"

"I beg your pardon, Mamma," said the younger lady, with a quiet smile; "you look so surprised, that Mr. Ingram will give me credit for not often erring in that way. You look as though a hare had turned and attacked you."

"That would give most people a fright," said Ingram with a laugh. He was rapidly forgetting the object of his mission. The almost childish softness of voice of this girl, and the perfect composure with which she uttered little sayings showed considerable sharpness of observation, and a keen enjoyment of the grotesque, had an odd sort of fascination for him. He totally forgot that Lavender had been fascinated by it too. If he had been reminded of the fact at this moment, he would have said that the boy had, as usual, got sentimental about a pretty pair of big grey eyes and fine profile, while he, Ingram, was possessed by nothing but a purely intellectual admiration of certain

fine qualities of brightness, sincerity of speech, and womanly shrewdness.

Luncheon, indeed, was over before any mention was made of the Lavenders; and when they returned to that subject, it appeared to Ingram that their relations had in the meantime got to be very friendly, and that they were really discussing this matter as if they formed a little family conclave.

"I have told Mr. Ingram, Mamma," Mrs. Lorraine said, "that so far as I am concerned, I will do whatever he thinks I ought to do. Mr. Lavender has been a friend of ours for some time; and of course he cannot be treated with rudeness or incivility; but if we are wounding the feelings of anyone by asking him to come here—and he certainly has visited us pretty often—why, it would be easy to lessen the number of his calls. Is that what we should do, Mr. Ingram? You would not have us quarrel with him?"

"Especially," said Mrs. Kavanagh, with a smile, "that there is no certainty he will spend more of his time with his wife merely because he spends less of it here. And yet I fancy he is a very good-natured man."

"He *is* very good-natured," said Ingram, with decision. "I have known him for years, and I know that he is exceedingly unselfish, that he would do ridiculously generous things to serve a friend, and that a better-intentioned fellow does not breathe in the world. But he is, at times, I admit, very thoughtless and inconsiderate——"

"That sort of good-nature," said Mrs. Lorraine, in her gentlest voice, "is very good in its way, but rather uncertain. So long as it shines in one direction, it is all right, and quite trustworthy; for you want a hard

brush to brush sunlight off a wall. But when the sunlight shifts, you know——"

"The wall is left in the cold. Well," said Ingram, "I am afraid it is impossible for me to dictate to you what you ought to do. I do not wish to draw you into any interference between husband and wife, or even to let Mr. Lavender know that you think he is not treating Shei—Mrs. Lavender—properly. But if you were to hint to him that he ought to pay some attention to her—that he should not be going everywhere as if he were a young bachelor in chambers; if you would discourage his coming to see you without bringing her also, and so forth—surely he would see what you mean. Perhaps I ask too much of you; but I had intended to ask more. The fact is, Mrs. Kavanagh, I had done your daughter the injustice of supposing——"

"I thought we had agreed to say no more about that," said Mrs. Lorraine, quickly; and Ingram was silent.

Half an hour thereafter he was walking back through Holland Park, through the warm light of an autumn afternoon. The place seemed much changed since he had seen it a couple of hours before. The double curve of big houses had a more friendly and hospitable look; the very air seemed to be more genial and comfortable since he had driven up here in the hansom.

Perhaps Mr. Ingram was at this moment a little more perturbed, pleased, and bewildered than he would have liked to confess. He had discovered a great deal in these two hours; been much surprised and fascinated; and had come away fairly stupefied with the result of his mission. He had, indeed, been suc-

cessful: Lavender would now find a different welcome awaiting him in the house in which he had been spending nearly all his time, to the neglect of his wife. But the fact is, that as Edward Ingram went rapidly over in his own mind everything that had occurred since his entrance into that house; as he anxiously recalled the remarks made to him, the tone and looks accompanying them, and his own replies, it was not of Lavender's affairs alone that he thought. He confessed to himself frankly that he had never yet met any woman who had so surprised him into admiration on their first meeting.

Yet what had she said? Nothing very particular. Was it in the bright intelligence of the grey eyes, that seemed to see everything he meant with an instant quickness, and that seemed to agree with him even before he spoke? He reflected, now that he was in the open air, that he must have persecuted these two women dreadfully. In getting away from Lavender's affairs, they had touched on pictures, books, and what not—on all sorts of topics, indeed, except those which, as Ingram had anticipated, such a creature as Mrs. Lorraine would naturally have found interesting. And he had to confess to himself that he had lectured his two helpless victims most unmercifully. He was quite conscious that he sometimes laid down the law in an authoritative and even sententious manner. On first going into the house, certain things said by Mrs. Lorraine had almost surprised him into a mood of mere acquiescence; but after luncheon he had assumed his ordinary manner of tutor in general to the universe, and had informed those two women, in a distinct fashion, what their opinions ought to be on half the social conundrums of the day.

He now reflected, with much compunction, that this was highly improper. He ought to have asked about flower-shows; and inquired whether the Princess of Wales was looking well of late. Some reference to the last Parisian comedy might have introduced a disquisition on the new greys and greens of the French milliners, with a passing mention made of the price paid for a pair of ponies by a certain Marquise unattached. He had not spoken of one of these things; perhaps he could not, if he had tried. He remembered, with an awful consciousness of guilt, that he had actually discoursed of woman-suffrage, of the public conscience of New York, of the extirpation of the Indians, and a dozen different things, not only taking no heed of any opinions that his audience of two might hold, but insisting on their accepting his opinions as the expression of absolute and incontrovertible truth.

He became more and more dissatisfied with himself. If he could only go back, now, he would be much more wary, more submissive and complaisant, more anxious to please. What right had he to abuse the courtesy and hospitality of these two strangers, and lecture them on the Constitution of their own country? He was annoyed beyond expression that they had listened to him with so much patience.

And yet he could not have seriously offended them; for they had earnestly besought him to dine with them on the following Tuesday evening, to meet an American judge; and, when he had consented, Mrs. Lorraine had written down on a card the date and hour, lest he should forget. He had that card in his pocket: surely he could not have offended them? If he had pursued this series of questions, he might

have gone on to ask himself why he should be so anxious not to have offended these two new friends. He was not ordinarily very sensitive to the opinions that might be formed of him—more especially by persons living out of his own sphere, with whom he was not likely to associate. He did not, indeed, as a general rule, suffer himself to be perturbed about anything; and yet, as he went along the busy thoroughfare at this moment, he was conscious that rarely in his life had he been so ill at ease.

Something now occurred that startled him out of his reverie. Communing with himself, he was staring blankly ahead, taking little note of the people whom he saw. But somehow, in a vague and dream-like way, he seemed to become aware that there was some one in front of him—a long way ahead as yet—whom he knew. He was still thinking of Mrs. Lorraine, and unconsciously postponing the examination of this approaching figure, or rather pair of figures, when, with a sudden start, he found Sheila's sad and earnest eyes fixed upon him. He woke up as from a dream. He saw that young Mosenberg was with her; and naturally the boy would have approached Ingram, and stopped, and spoken. But Ingram paid no attention to him. He was, with a quick pang at his heart, regarding Sheila, with the knowledge that on her rested the cruel decision as to whether she should come forward to him or not. He was not aware that her husband had forbidden her to have any communication with him; yet he had guessed as much, partly from his knowledge of Lavender's impatient disposition, and partly from the glance he caught of her eyes when he woke up from his trance.

Young Mosenberg turned with surprise to his

companion. She was passing on; he did not even see that she had bowed to Ingram, with a face flushed with shame and pain, and with eyes cast down. Ingram, too, was passing on, without even shaking hands with her, or uttering a word. Mosenberg was too bewildered to attempt any protest; he merely followed Sheila, with a conviction that something desperate had occurred, and that he would best consult her feelings by making no reference to it.

But that one look that the girl had directed to her old friend, before she bowed and passed on, had filled him with dismay and despair. It was somehow like the piteous look of a wounded animal, incapable of expressing its pain. All thoughts and fancies of his own little vexations or embarrassments were instantly banished from him; he could only see before him those sad and piteous eyes, full of kindness to him, he thought, and of grief that she should be debarred from speaking to him, and of resignation to her own lot.

Gwdyr House did not get much work out of him that day. He sat in a small room in a back part of the building, looking out on a lonely little square, silent and ruddy with the reflected light of the sunset.

"A hundred Mrs. Lorraines," he was thinking to himself, bitterly enough, "will not save my poor Sheila. She will die of a broken heart. I can see it in her face. And it is I who have done it—from first to last it is I who have done it; and now I can do nothing to help her."

That became the burden and refrain of all his reflections. It was he who had done this frightful thing. It was he who had taken away the young Highland girl—his good Sheila—from her home; and

ruined her life and broken her heart. And he could do nothing to help her.

CHAPTER IV.

Sheila's Stratagem.

"We met Mr. Ingram to-day," said young Mosenberg, ingenuously.

He was dining with Lavender, not at home, but at a certain club in St. James's Street; and either his curiosity was too great, or he had forgotten altogether Ingram's warnings to him that he should hold his tongue.

"Oh, did you?" said Lavender, showing no great interest. "Waiter, some French mustard. What did Ingram say to you?"

The question was asked with much apparent indifference; and the boy stared.

"Well," he said, at length, "I suppose there is some misunderstanding between Mrs. Lavender and Mr. Ingram, for they both saw each other, and they both passed on without speaking; I was very sorry, yes. I thought they were friends. I thought Mr. Ingram knew Mrs. Lavender even before you did; but they did not speak to each other, not one word."

Lavender was in one sense pleased to hear this. He liked to hear that his wife was obedient to him. But, he said to himself, with a sharp twinge of conscience, she was carrying her obedience too far. He had never meant that she should not even speak to her old friend. He would show Sheila that he was not unreasonable. He would talk to her about it as soon as he got home, and in as kindly a way as was possible.

Mosenberg did not play billiards, but they remained late in the billiard-room, Lavender playing pool, and getting out of it rather successfully. He could not speak to Sheila that night; but next morning, before going out, he did.

"Sheila," he said, "Mosenberg told me last night that you met Mr. Ingram, and did not speak to him. Now, I didn't mean anything like that. You must not think me unreasonable. All I want is, that he shall not interfere with our affairs and try to raise some unpleasantness between you and me, such as might arise from the interference of even the kindest of friends. When you meet him outside, or at anyone's house, I hope you will speak to him just as usual." Sheila replied, calmly—

"If I am not allowed to receive Mr. Ingram here, I cannot treat him as a friend elsewhere. I would rather not have friends whom I can only speak to in the streets."

"Very well," said Lavender, wincing under the rebuke, but fancying that she would soon repent her of this resolve. In the meantime, if she would have it so, she should have it so.

So that was an end of this question of Mr. Ingram's interference for the present. But very soon—in a couple of days, indeed—Lavender perceived the change that had been wrought in the house in Holland Park to which he had been accustomed to resort.

"Cecilia," Mrs. Kavanagh had said, on Ingram's leaving, "you must not be rude to Mr. Lavender."

She knew the perfect independence of that gentle young lady, and was rather afraid it might carry her too far.

"Of course I shall not be, Mamma," Mrs. Lorraine

had said. "Did you ever hear of such a courageous act as that man coming up to two strangers and challenging them all on behalf of a girl married to some one else? You know that was the meaning of his visit. He thought I was flirting with Mr. Lavender, and keeping him from his wife. I wonder how many men there are in London who would have walked twenty yards to help in such a matter."

"My dear, he may have been in love with that pretty young lady before she was married."

"Oh no," said the clear-eyed daughter, quietly, but quite confidently. "He would not be so ready to show his interest in her, if that were so. Either he would be modest, and ashamed of his rejection; or vain, and attempt to make a mystery about it."

"Perhaps you are right," said the mother; she seldom found her daughter wrong on such points.

"I am sure I am right, Mamma. He talks about her as fondly, and frequently, and openly, as a man might talk about his own daughter. Besides, you can see he is talking honestly. That man couldn't deceive a child if he were to try. You see everything in his face."

"You seem to have been much interested in him," said Mrs. Kavanagh, with no appearance of sarcasm.

"Well, I don't think I meet such men often, and that is the truth. Do you?"

This was carrying the war into the enemy's country.

"I like him very well," said Mrs. Kavanagh. "I think he is honest. I do not think he dresses very carefully; and he is perhaps too intent on convincing you that his opinions are right."

"Well, for my part," said her daughter, with just the least tinge of warmth in her manner, "I confess I like a man who has opinions, and who is not afraid to say so. I don't find many who have. And as for his dressing, one gets rather tired of men who come to you every evening to impress you with the excellence of their tailor. As if women were to be captured by millinery! Don't we know the value of linen and woollen fabrics?"

"My dear child, you are throwing away your vexation on some one whom I don't know. It isn't Mr. Lavender?"

"Oh dear, no! He is not so silly as that: he dresses well, but there is perfect freedom about his dress. He is too much an artist to sacrifice himself to his clothes."

"I am glad you have a good word for him at last. I think you have been rather hard on him since Mr. Ingram called; and that is the reason I asked you to be careful."

She was quite careful, but as explicit as good manners would allow. Mrs. Lorraine was most particular in asking about Mrs. Lavender, and in expressing her regret that they so seldom saw her.

"She has been brought up in the country, you know," said Lavender, with a smile; "and there the daughters of a house are taught a number of domestic duties that they would consider it a sin to neglect. She would be unhappy if you caused her to neglect them; she would take her pleasure with a bad conscience."

"But she cannot be occupied with them all day."

"My dear Mrs. Lorraine, how often have we discussed the question! And you know you have me at

a disadvantage; for how can I describe to you what those mysterious duties are? I only know that she is pretty nearly always busy with something or other; and in the evening, of course, she is generally too tired to think of going out anywhere."

"Oh, but you must try to get her out. Next Tuesday, now, Judge—— is going to dine with us, and you know how amusing he is. If you have no other engagements, couldn't you bring Mrs. Lavender to dine with us on that evening?"

Now, on former occasions, something of the same sort of invitation had frequently been given; and it was generally answered by Lavender's giving an excuse for his wife, and promising to come himself. What was his astonishment to find Mrs. Lorraine plainly, and most courteously, intimating that the invitation was addressed distinctly to Mr. and Mrs. Lavender as a couple! When he regretted that Mrs. Lavender could not come, she said, quietly—

"Oh, I am so sorry! You would have met an old friend of yours here, as well as the Judge—Mr. Ingram."

Lavender made no further sign of surprise or curiosity than to lift his eyebrows, and say—

"Indeed!"

But when he left the house, certain dark suspicions were troubling his mind. Nothing had been said as to the manner in which Ingram had made the acquaintance of Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter; but there was that in Mrs. Lorraine's manner which convinced Lavender that something had happened. Had Ingram carried his interference to the extent of complaining to them? Had he overcome a repugnance which he had repeatedly admitted, and thrust himself

upon these two people for this very purpose of making him, Lavender, odious and contemptible? Lavender's cheeks burned as he thought of this possibility. Mrs. Lorraine had been most courteous to him; but the longer he dwelt on these vague surmises, the deeper grew his consciousness that he had been turned out of the place, morally if not physically. What was that excess of courtesy but a cloak? If she had meant less, she would have been more careless; and all through the interview he had remarked that, instead of the free warfare of talk that generally went on between them, Mrs. Lorraine was most formally polite, and apparently watchful of her words.

He went home in a passion, which was all the more consuming that it could not be vented on anyone. As Sheila had not spoken to Ingram—as she had even nerved herself to wound him by passing him without notice in the street—she could not be held responsible; and yet he wished that he could have upbraided some one for this mischief that had been done. Should he go straight down to Ingram's lodgings, and have it out with him? At first he was strongly inclined to do so; but wiser counsels prevailed. Ingram had a keen and ready tongue; and a way of saying things that made them rankle afterwards in the memory. Besides, he would go into court with a defective case. He could say nothing, unless Ingram admitted that he had tried to poison the mind of Mrs. Lorraine against him; and, of course, if there was a quarrel, who would be so foolish as to make such an admission? Ingram would laugh at him; would refuse to admit or deny; would increase his anger without affording him an opportunity of revenging himself.

Sheila could see that her husband was troubled,

but could not divine the cause, and had long ago given up any habit of inquiry. He ate his dinner almost in silence, and then said he had to make a call on a friend, and that he would perhaps drop in to the club on his way home, so that she was not to sit up for him. She was not surprised or hurt at the announcement. She was accustomed to spend her evenings alone. She fetched down his cigar-case, put it in his top-coat pocket, and brought him the coat. Then he kissed her, and went out.

But this evening, at least, she had abundant occupation, and that of a sufficiently pleasant kind. For some little time she had been harbouring in her mind a dark and mysterious plot, and she was glad of an opportunity to think it out and arrange its details. Mairi was coming to London; and she had carefully concealed the fact from her husband. A little surprise, of a dramatic sort, was to be prepared for him; with what result, who could tell? All of a sudden Lavender was to be precipitated into the island of Lewis, as nearly as that could be imitated in a house at Notting Hill.

This was Sheila's scheme, and on these lonely evenings she could sit by herself with much satisfaction and ponder over the little points of it and its possible success. Mairi was coming to London under the escort of a worthy Glasgow fishmonger whom Mr. Mackenzie knew. She would arrive after Lavender had left for his studio. Then she and Sheila would set to work to transform the smoking room, that was sometimes called a library, into something resembling the quaint little drawing-room in Sheila's home. Mairi was bringing up a quantity of heather gathered fresh from the rocks beside the White Water; she was

bringing up some peacocks' feathers, too, for the mantelpiece, and two or three big shells; and, best of all, she was to put in her trunk a real and veritable lump of peat, well dried, and easy to light. Then you must know that Sheila had already sketched out the meal that was to be placed on the table, so soon as the room had been done up in the Highland fashion, and this peat lit, so as to send its fragrant smoke abroad. A large salmon was to make its appearance first of all. There would be bottles of beer on the table; also one of those bottles of Norwegian make, filled with whisky. And when Lavender went with wonder into this small room, when he smelt the fragrant peat-smoke—and everyone knows how powerful the sense of smell is in recalling bygone associations—when he saw the smoking salmon, and the bottled beer and the whisky—and when he suddenly found Mairi coming into the room, and saying to him, in her sweet Highland fashion, "And are you ferry well, sir?"—would not his heart warm to the old ways and kindly homeliness of the house in Borva, and would not some glimpse of the happy and half-forgotten time that was now so sadly and strangely remote, cause him to break down that barrier between himself and Sheila that this artificial life in the South had placed there?

So the child dreamed; and was happy in dreaming of it. Sometimes she grew afraid of her project; she had not had much experience in deception, and the mere concealment of Mairi's coming was a hard thing to bear. But surely her husband would take this trick in good part. It was only, after all, a joke. To put a little barbaric splendour of decoration into the quiet little smoking-room; to have a scent of peat-

smoke in the air; and to have a timid, sweet-voiced, pretty Highland girl suddenly make her appearance, with an odour of the sea about her, as it were, and a look of fresh breezes in the colour of her cheeks—what mortal man could find fault with this innocent jest? Sheila's moments of doubt were succeeded by long hours of joyous confidence, in which a happy light shone on her face. She went through the house with a brisk step; she sang to herself as she went; she was kinder than ever to the small children who came into the Square every forenoon, and whose acquaintance she had very speedily made; she gave each of her crossing-sweepers threepence instead of twopence in passing. The servants had never seen her in such good spirits; she was exceptionally generous in presenting them with articles of attire; they might have had half the week in holidays if Mr. Lavender had not to be attended to. A small gentleman of three years of age lived next door, and his acquaintance also she had made, by means of his nurse. At this time his stock of toys, which Sheila had kept carefully renewed, became so big, that he might, with proper management, have set up a stall in the Lowther Arcade.

Just before she left Lewis, her father had called her to him, and said—

"Sheila, I wass wanting to tell you about something. It is not everyone that will care to hef his money given away to poor folk, and it wass many a time I said to myself that when you were married maybe your husband would think you were giving too much money to the poor folk, as you wass doing in Borva. And it iss this fifty pounds I hef got for you, Sheila, in ten bank-notes, and you will take them with you for your own money, that you will not hef any

trouble about giving things to people. And when the fifty pounds will be done, I will send you another fifty pounds, and it will be no difference to me whatever. And if there is any one in Borva you would be for sending money to, there is your own money; for there is many a one would take the money from Sheila Mackenzie that would not be for taking it from an English stranger in London. And when you will send it to them, you will send it to me; and I will tek it to them, and I will tell them that this money is from my Sheila, and from no one else whatever."

This was all the dowry that Sheila carried with her to the South. Mackenzie would willingly have given her half his money, if she would have taken it, or if her husband had desired it; but the old king of Borva had profound and far-reaching schemes in his head about the small fortune he might otherwise have accorded to his daughter. This wealth, such as it was, was to be a magnet to draw this young English gentleman back to the Hebrides. It was all very well for Mr. Lavender to have plenty of money at present; he might not always have it. Then the time would come for Mackenzie to say, "Look here, young man; I can support myself easily and comfortably by my farming and fishing. The money I have saved is at your disposal, so long as you consent to remain in Lewis—in Stornoway, if you please,—elsewhere if you please—only in Lewis. And while you are painting pictures, and making as much money as you can that way, you can have plenty of fishing, and shooting, and amusement: and my guns and boats and rods are all at your service." Mr. Mackenzie considered that no man could resist such an offer.

Sheila, of course, told her husband of the sum of

money she owned; and for a long time it was a standing joke between them. He addressed her with much respect, and was careful to inform her of the fluctuations of the money-market. Sometimes he borrowed a sovereign of her; and never without giving her an I O U, which was faithfully reclaimed. But by and by she perceived that he grew less and less to like the mention of this money. Perhaps it resembled too closely the savings which the over-cautious folks about Borvabost would not entrust to a bank, but kept hidden about their huts in the heel of a stocking. At all events, Sheila saw that her husband did not like her to go to this fund for her charities; and so the fifty pounds that her father had given her lasted a long time. During this period of jubilation, in which she looked forward to touching her husband's heart by an innocent little stratagem, more frequent appeals were made to the drawer in which the treasure was locked up, so that in the end her private dowry was reduced to thirty pounds.

If Ingram could have but taken part in this plan of hers! The only regret that was mingled with her anticipations of a happier future concerned this faithful friend of hers, who seemed to have been cut off from them for ever. And it soon became apparent to her that her husband, so far from inclining to forget the misunderstanding that had arisen between Ingram and himself, seemed to feel increased resentment, insomuch that she was most careful to avoid mentioning his name.

She was soon to meet him, however. Lavender was resolved that he would not appear to have retired from the field, merely because Ingram had entered it. He would go to this dinner on the Tuesday evening, and Sheila would accompany him. First he asked her.

Much as she would have preferred not visiting these particular people, she cheerfully acquiesced; she was not going to be churlish or inconsiderate on the very eve of her dramatic *coup*. Then he went to Mrs. Lorraine, and said he had persuaded Sheila to come with them; and the young American lady and her mamma were good enough to say how glad they were she had come to this decision. They appeared to take it for granted that it was Sheila alone who had declined former invitations.

"Mr. Ingram will be there on Tuesday evening," said Lavender to his wife.

"I was not aware he knew them," said Sheila, remembering, indeed, how scrupulously Ingram had refused to know them.

"He has made their acquaintance for his own purposes, doubtless," said Lavender. "I suppose he will appear in a frock-coat, with a bright blue tie, and he will say 'Sir' to the waiters when he does not understand them."

"I thought you said Mr. Ingram belonged to a very good family," said Sheila, quietly.

"That is so. But each man is responsible for his own manners; and as all the society he sees consists of a cat and some wooden pipes, in a couple of dingy rooms in Sloane Street, you can't expect him not to make an ass of himself."

"I have never seen him make himself ridiculous: I do not think it possible," said Sheila, with a certain precision of speech which Lavender had got to know meant much. "But that is a matter for himself. Perhaps you will tell me what I am to do when I meet him at Mrs. Kavanagh's house."

"Of course, you must meet him as you would any-

one else you know. If you don't wish to speak to him, you need not do so. Saying 'Good evening' costs nothing."

"If he takes me in to dinner?" she asked, calmly.

"Then you must talk to him as you would to any stranger," he said, impatiently. "Ask him if he has been to the opera, and he won't know there is no opera going on. Tell him that town is very full, and he won't know that everybody has left. Say you may meet him again at Mrs. Kavanagh's, and you'll see that he doesn't know they mean to start for the Tyrol in a fortnight. I think you and I must also be settling soon where we mean to go. I don't think we could do better than go to the Tyrol."

She did not answer. It was clear that he had given up all intention of going up to Lewis, for that year at least. But she would not beg him to alter his decision just yet. Mairi was coming; and that experiment of the enchanted room had still to be tried.

As they drove round to Mrs. Kavanagh's house on that Tuesday evening, she thought, with much bitterness of heart, of the possibility of her having to meet Mr. Ingram in the fashion her husband had suggested. Would it not be better, if he did take her in to dinner, to throw herself entirely on his mercy, and ask him not to talk to her at all? She would address herself when there was a chance, to her neighbour on the other side: if she remained silent altogether, no great harm would be done.

When she went into the drawing-room, her first glance round was for him, and he was the first person whom she saw. For, instead of withdrawing into a corner to make one neighbour the victim of his shyness, or concealing his embarrassment in studying the

photographic albums, Mr. Ingram was coolly standing on the hearthrug, with both hands in his trousers' pockets, while he was engaged in giving the American Judge a great deal of authoritative information about America. The Judge was a tall, fair, stout, good-natured man, fond of joking and a good dinner; and he was content at this moment to sit quietly in an easy-chair, with a pleasant smile on his face, and be lectured about his own country by this sallow little man, whom he took to be a Professor of Modern History at some University or other.

Ingram, as soon as he found that Sheila was in the room, relieved her from any doubt as to his intentions. He merely came forward, shook hands with her, said, "How do you do, Mrs. Lavender?" and went back to the Judge. She might have been an acquaintance of yesterday, or a friend of twenty years' standing: no one could tell by his manner. As for Sheila, she parted with his hand reluctantly. She tried to look, too, what she dared not say; but whatever of regret, and kindness, and assurance of friendship was in her eyes, he did not see. He scarcely glanced at her face; he went off at once, and plunged again into the Cincinnati Convention.

Mrs. Kavanagh and Mrs. Lorraine were exceedingly and almost obtrusively kind to her; but she scarcely heard what they said to her. It seemed so strange and so sad to her that her old friend should be standing near her, and she so far removed from him that she dared not go and speak to him. She could not understand it sometimes—everything around her seemed to get confused, until she felt as if she were sinking in a great sea, and could utter but one despairing cry as she saw the light disappear above her head. When

they went in to dinner, she saw that Mr. Ingram's seat was on Mrs. Lorraine's right hand; and although she could hear him speak, as he was almost right opposite to her, it seemed to her that his voice sounded as if it were far away. The man who had taken her in was a tall, brown-whiskered, and faultlessly-dressed person who never spoke; so that she was allowed to sit and listen to the conversation between Mrs. Lorraine and Ingram. They appeared to be on excellent terms. You would have fancied they had known each other for years. And as Sheila sat and saw how pre-occupied and pleased with his companion Mr. Ingram was, perhaps now and again the bitter question arose to her mind, whether this woman, who had taken away her husband, was seeking to take away her friend also. Sheila knew nothing of all that had happened within these past few days. She knew only that she was alone—without either husband or friend; and it seemed to her that this pale American girl had taken both away from her.

Ingram was in one of his happiest moods, and was seeking to prove to Mrs. Lorraine that this present dinner-party ought to be an especially pleasant one. Everybody was going away somewhere; and, of course, she must know that the expectation of travelling was much more delightful than the reality of it. What could surpass the sense of freedom, of power, of hope enjoyed by the happy folks who sat down to an open atlas, and began to sketch out routes for their coming holidays? Where was he going? Oh, he was going to the North. Had Mrs. Lorraine never seen Edinburgh Castle rising out of a grey fog, like the ghost of some great building belonging to the times of Arthurian romance? Had she never seen the northern

twilights, and the awful gloom and wild colours of Loch Coruisk and the Skye hills? There was no holiday-making so healthy, so free from restraint, as that among the far Highland hills and glens, where the clear mountain air, scented with miles and miles of heather, seemed to produce a sort of intoxication of good spirits within one. Then the yachting round the wonderful islands of the West—the rapid runs of a bright forenoon, the shooting of the wild sea-birds, the scrambled dinners in the small cabin, the still nights in the small harbours, with a scent of sea-weed abroad, and the white stars shining down on the trembling water. Yes, he was going yachting this autumn —in about a fortnight he hoped to start. His friend was at present away up Loch Boisdale, in South Uist, and he did not know how to get there except by going to Skye, and taking his chance of some boat going over. Where would they go then? He did not know. Wherever his friend liked. It would be enough for him if they kept moving about, seeing the strange sights of the sea, and the air, and the lonely shores of those northern islands. Perhaps they might even try to reach St. Kilda——

"Oh, Mr. Ingram, won't you go and see my papa!"

The cry that suddenly reached him was like the cry of a broken heart. He started as from a trance, and found Sheila regarding him with a piteous appeal in her face; she had been listening intently to all he had said.

"Oh yes, Sheila," he said, kindly, and quite forgetting that he was speaking to her before strangers; "of course I must go and see your papa, if we are any way near the Lewis. Perhaps you may be there then?"

"No," said Sheila, looking down.

"Won't you go to the Highlands this autumn?" Mrs. Lorraine asked, in a friendly way.

"No," said Sheila, in a measured voice, as she looked her enemy fair in the face; "I think we are going to the Tyrol."

If the child had only known what occurred to Mrs. Lorraine's mind at this moment! Not a triumphant sense of Lavender's infatuation, as Sheila probably fancied; but a very definite resolution that, if Frank Lavender went to the Tyrol, it was not with either her or her mother he should go.

"Mrs. Lavender's father is an old friend of mine," said Ingram, loud enough for all to hear; "and hospitable as all Highlanders are, I have never met his equal in that way, and I have tried his patience a good many times. What do you think, Mrs. Lorraine, of a man who would give up his best gun to you, even though you couldn't shoot a bit, and he particularly proud of his shooting? And so, if you lived with him for a month or six months—each day the best of everything for you, the second-best for your friend, the worst for himself. Wasn't it so, Lavender?"

It was a direct challenge sent across the table; and Sheila's heart beat quick lest her husband should say something ungracious.

"Yes, certainly," said Lavender, with a readiness that pleased Sheila; "I at least have no right to complain of his hospitality."

"Your papa is a very handsome man," said Mrs. Lorraine to Sheila, bringing the conversation back to their own end of the table "I have seen few finer heads than that drawing you have. Mr. Lavender did that, did he not? Why has he never done one of you?"

"He is too busy, I think, just now," Sheila said;

perhaps not knowing that from Mrs. Lorraine's waist-belt at that moment depended a fan which might have given evidence as to the extreme scarcity of time under which Lavender was supposed to labour.

"He has a splendid head," said Ingram. "Did you know that he is called the King of Borva up there?"

"I have heard him being called the King of Thule," said Mrs. Lorraine, turning with a smile to Sheila, "and of his daughter being styled a Princess. Do you know the ballad of the King of Thule in 'Faust,' Mrs. Lavender?"

"In the opera?—yes," said Sheila.

"Will you sing it for us after dinner?"

"If you like."

The promise was fulfilled, in a fashion. The notion that Mr. Ingram was about to go away up to Lewis, to the people who knew her, and to her father's house, with no possible answer to the questions which would certainly be showered upon him as to why she had not come also, troubled Sheila deeply. The ladies went into the drawing-room, and Mrs. Lorraine got out the song. Sheila sat down to the piano, thinking far more of that small stone house at Borva than of the King of Thule's castle overlooking the sea; and yet somehow the first lines of the song, though she knew them well enough, sent a pang to her heart as she glanced at them. She touched the first notes of the accompaniment, and she looked at the words again.

"Over the sea in Thulë of old
Reigned a King who was true hearted,
Who in remembrance of one departed—"

A mist came over her eyes. Was she the one who had departed, leaving the old King in his desolate house by the sea, where he could only think of her

as he sat in his solitary chamber, with the night winds howling round the shore outside? When her birthday had come round, she knew that he must have silently drunk to her, though not out of a beaker of gold. And now, when mere friends and acquaintances were free to speed away to the North, and get a welcome from the folks in Borva, and listen to the Atlantic waves dashing lightly in among the rocks, her hope of getting thither had almost died out. Among such people as landed on Stornoway quay from the big *Clansman*, her father would seek one face, and seek it in vain. And Duncan, and Scarlett, and even John the Piper—all the well-remembered folks who lived far away across the Minch—they would ask why Miss Sheila was never coming back. Mrs. Lorraine had been standing aside from the piano. Noticing that Sheila had played the introduction to the song twice over, in an undetermined manner, she came forward a step or two, and pretended to be looking at the music. Tears were running down Sheila's face. Mrs. Lorraine put her hand on the girl's shoulder, and sheltered her from observation, and said aloud—

"You have it in a different key, have you not? Pray don't sing it. Sing something else. Do you know any of Gounod's sacred songs? Let me see if we can find anything for you in this volume."

They were a long time finding anything in that volume. When they did find it, behold! it was one of Mrs. Lorraine's songs, and that young lady said, if Mrs. Lavender would only allow herself to be superseded for a few minutes——And so Sheila walked, with her head down, to the conservatory, which was at the other end of the piano; and Mrs. Lorraine not only sung this French song, but sang every one of the

verses; and at the end of it she had quite forgotten that Sheila had promised to sing.

"You are very sensitive," she said to Sheila, coming into the conservatory.

"I am very stupid," Sheila said, with her face burning. "But it is a long time since I will see the Highlands—and Mr. Ingram was talking of the places I know—and—and so——"

"I understand well enough," said Mrs. Lorraine, tenderly, as if Sheila were a mere child in her hands. "But you must not get your eyes red. You have to sing some of those Highland songs for us yet, when the gentlemen come in. Come up to my room, and I will make your eyes all right. Oh, do not be afraid! I shall not bring you down like Lady Leveret. Did you ever see anything like that woman's face to-night? It reminds me of the window of an oil-and-colour shop: I wonder she does not catch flies with her cheeks."

So all the people, Sheila learned that night, were going away from London; and soon she and her husband would join in the general stampede of the very last dwellers in town. But Mairi? What was to become of her after that little plot had been played out? Sheila could not leave Mairi to see London by herself; she had been enjoying beforehand the delight of taking the young girl about, and watching the wonder of her eyes. Nor could she fairly postpone Mairi's visit; and Mairi was coming up in another couple of days.

On the morning on which the visitor from the far Hebrides was to make her appearance in London, Sheila felt conscious of a great hypocrisy in bidding good-bye to her husband. On some excuse or other,

she had had breakfast ordered early; and he found himself ready at half-past nine to go out for the day.

"Frank," she said, "will you come in to lunch at two?"

"Why?" he asked: he did not often have luncheon at home.

"I will go into the Park with you in the afternoon, if you like," she said: all the scene had been diligently rehearsed, on one side, before.

Lavender was a little surprised, but he was in an amiable mood.

"All right," he said. "Have something with olives in it. Two sharp."

With that he went out; and Sheila, with a wild commotion at her heart, saw him walk away through the Square. She was afraid Mairi might have arrived before he left. And, indeed, he had not gone above a few minutes when a four-wheeler drove up, and an elderly man got out and waited for the timid-faced girl inside to alight. With a rush like that of a startled deer, Sheila was down the stairs, along the hall, and on the pavement; and it was, "Oh, Mairi! and have you come at last? And are you very well? And how are all the people in Borva? And, Mr. M'Alpine, how are you, and will you come into the house?"

Certainly, that was a strange sight for a decorous London square; the mistress of a house, a young girl with bare head, coming out on the pavement to shake hands in a frantic fashion with a young maid-servant and an elderly man whose clothes had been pretty well tanned by sunlight and sea-water. And Sheila would herself help to carry Mairi's luggage in. And she would take no denial from Mr. M'Alpine, whose

luggage was also carried in. And she would herself pay the cabman, as strangers did not know about these things: Sheila's knowledge being exhibited by her hastily giving the man five shillings for driving from Euston Station. And there was breakfast waiting for them both, as soon as Mairi could get her face washed; and would Mr. M'Alpine have a glass of whisky after the night's travelling?—and it was very good whisky whatever, as it had come all the way from Stornoway. Mr. M'Alpine was nothing loth.

"And wass you pretty well, Miss Sheila?" said Mairi, looking timidly and hastily up, and forgetting altogether that Sheila had another name now. "It will be a great thing for me to go back to sa Lewis, and tell them I wass seeing you, and you wass looking so well. And I will be thinking I wass neffer coming to anyone I knew any more! and it is a great fright I hef had since we came away from sa Lewis; and I wass thinking we would neffer find you among all sa people and so far away across sa sea and sa land. Eh——!" The girl stopped in astonishment. Her eyes had wandered up to a portrait on the walls; and here, in this very room, after she had travelled over all this great distance, apparently leaving behind her everything but the memory of her home, was Mr. Mackenzie himself, looking at her from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"You must have seen that picture in Borva, Mairi," Sheila said. "Now come with me, like a good girl, and get yourself ready for breakfast. Do you know, Mairi, it does my heart good to hear you talk again. I don't think I shall be able to let you go back to the Lewis."

"But you hef changed ferry much in your way

of speaking, Miss—Mrs. Lavender," said Mairi, with an effort. "You will speak just like sa English now."

"The English don't say so," replied Sheila, with a smile, leading the way upstairs.

Mr. M'Alpine had his business to attend to; but, being a sensible man, he took advantage of the profuse breakfast placed before him. Mairi was a little too frightened, and nervous, and happy to eat much; but Mr. M'Alpine was an old traveller, not to be put out by the mere meeting of two girls. He listened in a grave and complacent manner to the rapid questions and answers of Mairi and her hostess; but he himself was too busy to join in the conversation much. At the end of breakfast, he accepted, after a little pressing, half a glass of whisky; and then, much comforted and in a thoroughly good humour with himself and the world, got his luggage out again and went on his way towards a certain inn in High Holborn.

"Ay, and where does the Queen live, Miss Sheila?" said Mairi. She had been looking at the furniture in Sheila's house, and wondering if the Queen lived in a place still more beautiful than this.

"A long way from here."

"And it iss no wonder," said Mairi, "she will neffer hef been in sa Lewis. I wass neffer thinking the world wass so big, and it wass many a time since me and Mr. M'Alpine hef come away from Styornoway, I wass thinking it wass too far for me effer to get back again. But it is many a one will say to me, before I hef left the Lewis, that I wass not to come home unless you wass coming too, and I wass to bring you back with me, Miss Sheila. And where is Bras, Miss Sheila?"

"You will see him by and by. He is out in the garden now." She said 'gyarden' without knowing it.

"And will he understood the Gaelic yet?"

"Oh yes," Sheila said, "and he is sure to remember you."

There was no mistake about that. When Mairi went into the back-garden, the demonstrations of delight on the part of the great deerhound were as pronounced as his dignity and gravity would allow. And Mairi fairly fell upon his neck and kissed him, and addressed to him a hundred endearing phrases in Gaelic, every word of which it was quite obvious that the dog understood. London was already beginning to be less terrible to her. She had met and talked with Sheila. Here was Bras. A portrait of the King of Borva was hung up inside, and all round the rooms were articles which she had known in the North, before Sheila had married and brought them away into this strange land.

"You have never asked after my husband, Mairi," said Sheila, thinking she would confuse the girl.

But Mairi was not confused. Probably she had been fancying that Mr. Lavender was down at the shore, or had gone out fishing, or something of that sort, and would return soon enough. It was Sheila, not he, whom she was concerned about. Indeed, Mairi had caught up a little of that jealousy of Lavender which was rife among the Borva folks. They would speak no ill of Mr. Lavender. The young gentleman whom Miss Sheila had chosen had by that very fact a claim upon their respect. Mr. Mackenzie's son-in-law was a person of importance. And yet, in their secret hearts, they bore a grudge against him. What right had he to come away up to the North and carry off the very pride of the island? Were English girls not good enough for him that he must needs come up

and take away Sheila Mackenzie, and keep her there in the South so that her friends and acquaintances saw no more of her? Before the marriage, Mairi had a great liking and admiration for Mr. Lavender. She was so pleased to see Miss Sheila pleased that she approved of the young man, and thanked him in her heart for making her cousin and mistress so obviously happy. Perhaps, indeed, Mairi managed to fall in love with him a little bit herself, merely by force of example and through sympathy with Sheila; and she was rapidly forming very good opinions of the English race, and their ways, and their looks. But when Lavender took away Sheila from Borva, a change came over Mairi's sentiments. She gradually fell in with the current opinions of the island—that it was a great pity Sheila had not married young Mac-Intyre, of Sutherland, or some who would have allowed her to remain among her own people. Mairi began to think that the English, though they were handsome, and good-natured, and free with their money, were on the whole a selfish race, inconsiderate, and forgetful of promises. She began to dislike the English, and wished they would stay in their own country, and not interfere with other people.

"I hope he is ferry well," said Mairi, dutifully: she could at least say that honestly.

"You will see him at two o'clock. He is coming in to luncheon; and he does not know you are here; and you are to be a great surprise to him, Mairi. And there is to be a greater surprise still; for we are going to make one of the rooms into the drawing-room at home; and you must open your boxes, and bring me down the heather and the peat, Mairi, and the two bottles; and then, you know, when the salmon is on

the table, and the whisky, and the beer, and Bras lying on the hearthrug, and the peat-smoke all through the room, then you will come in and shake hands with him, and he will think he is in Borva again."

Mairi was a little puzzled. She did not understand the intention of this strange thing. But she went and fetched the materials she had brought with her from Lewis, and Sheila and Mairi set to work.

It was a pleasant enough occupation for this bright forenoon, and Sheila, as she heard Mairi's sweet Highland speech, and as she brought from all parts of the house the curiosities sent her from the Hebrides, would almost have fancied she was superintending a "cleaning" of that museum-like little drawing-room at Borva. Skins of foxes, seals, and deer, stuffed eagles and strange fishes, masses of coral and wonderful carvings in wood brought from abroad, shells of every size from every clime—all these were brought together into Frank Lavender's smoking-room. The ordinary ornaments of the mantelpiece gave way to fanciful arrangements of peacocks' feathers. Fresh-blown ling and the beautiful spikes of the bell-heather formed the staple of the decorations, and Mairi had brought enough to adorn an assembly-room.

"That is like the Lewis people," Sheila said, with a laugh—she had not been in as happy a mood for many a day. "I asked you to bring one peat, and of course you brought two. Tell the truth, Mairi; could you have forced yourself to bring one peat?"

"I wass thinking it was safer to bring sa two," replied Mairi, blushing all over the fair and pretty face.

And, indeed, there being two peats, Sheila thought she might as well try an experiment with one. She crumbled down some pieces, put them on a plate, lit

them, and placed the plate outside the open window, on the sill. Presently a new, sweet, half-forgotten fragrance came floating in; and Sheila almost forgot the success of the experiment in the half-delighted, half-sad reminiscences called up by the scent of the peat. Mairi failed to see how anyone could wilfully smoke a house—anyone, that is to say, who did not save the smoke for his thatch. And who was so particular as Sheila had been about having the clothes come in from the washing dried, so that they should not retain this very odour that seemed now to delight her?

At last the room was finished, and Sheila contemplated it with much satisfaction. The table was laid, and on the white cloth stood the bottles most familiar to Borva. The peat-smoke still lingered in the air; she could not have wished anything to be better.

Then she went off to look after luncheon, and Mairi was permitted to go down and explore the mysteries of the kitchen. The servants were not accustomed to this interference and oversight, and might have resented it, only that Sheila had proved a very good mistress to them, and had shown, too, that she would have her own way when she wanted it. Suddenly, as Sheila was explaining to Mairi the use of some particular piece of mechanism, she heard a sound that made her heart jump. It was now but half-past one: and yet that was surely her husband's foot in the hall. For a moment she was too bewildered to know what to do. She heard him go straight into the very room she had been decorating, the door of which she had left open. Then, as she went upstairs, with her heart still beating fast, the first thing that met her eye was a tartan shawl belonging to Mairi that had been accidentally left in the passage. Her husband must have seen it.

"Sheila, what nonsense is this?" he said.

He was evidently in a hurry; and yet she could not answer, her heart was throbbing too quickly.

"Look here," he said, "I wish you'd give up this grotto-making till to-morrow. Mrs. Kavanagh, Mrs. Lorraine, and Lord Arthur Redmond are coming in to luncheon at two. I suppose you can get something decent for them. What is the matter? What is the meaning of all this?"

And then his eye rested on the tartan shawl, which he had really not noticed before.

"Who is in the house?" he said, "Have you asked some washerwoman to lunch?"

Sheila managed at last to say—

"It is Mairi come from Stornoway. I was thinking you would be surprised to see her when you came in——"

"And these preparations are for her!"

Sheila said nothing: there was that in the tone of her husband's voice which was gradually bringing her to herself, and giving her quite sufficient firmness.

"And now that this girl has come up, I suppose you mean to introduce her to all your friends; and I suppose you expect those people who are coming in half an hour to sit down at table with a kitchen-maid?"

"Mairi," said Sheila, standing quite erect, but with her eyes cast down, "is my cousin."

"Your cousin! Don't be ridiculous, Sheila. You know very well that Mairi is nothing more nor less than a scullery-maid, and I suppose you mean to take her out of the kitchen, and introduce her to people, and expect them to sit down at table with them. Is not that so?"

She did not answer, and he went on, impatiently, "Why was I not told that this girl was coming to stay

at my house? Surely I have some right to know what guests you invite, that I may be able at least to ask my friends not to come near the house while they are in it."

"That I did not tell you before—yes, that was a pity," said Sheila, sadly and calmly. "But it will be no trouble to you. When Mrs. Lorraine comes up at two o'clock, there will be luncheon for her and for her friends. She will not have to sit down with any of my relations, or with me, for if they are not fit to meet her, I am not; and it is not any great matter that I shall not meet her at two o'clock."

There was no passion of any sort in the measured and sad voice, nor in the somewhat pale face and downcast eyes. Perhaps it was this composure that deceived Frank Lavender; at all events, he turned and walked out of the house, satisfied that he would not have to introduce this Highland cousin to his friends, and just as certain that Sheila would repent of her resolve, and appear in the dining-room as usual.

Sheila went downstairs to the kitchen, where Mairi still stood awaiting her. She gave orders to one of the servants about having luncheon laid in the dining-room at two, and then she bade Mairi follow her upstairs.

"Mairi," she said, when they were alone, "I want you to put your things in your trunk at once—in five minutes if you can—I shall be waiting for you."

"Miss Sheila!" cried the girl, looking up to her friend's face with a sudden fright seizing her heart. "What is the matter with you? You are going to die!"

"There is nothing the matter, Mairi. I am going away."

She uttered the words placidly; but there was a pained look about the lips that could not be con-

cealed, and her face, unknown to herself, had the whiteness of despair in it.

"Going away!" said Mairi, in a bewildered way. "Where are you going, Miss Sheila?"

"I will tell you by and by. Get your trunk ready, Mairi. You are keeping me waiting."

Then she called for a servant, who was sent for a cab; and by the time the vehicle appeared, Mairi was ready to get into it, and her trunk was put on the top. Then, clad in the rough blue dress that she used to wear in Borva, and with no appearance of haste or fear in the calm and death-like face, Sheila came out from her husband's house, and found herself alone in the world. There were two little girls, the daughters of a neighbour, passing by at the time; she patted them on the head, and bade them good-morning. Could she recollect, five minutes thereafter, having seen them? There was a strange and distant look in her eyes. She got into the cab, and sat down by Mairi, and then took the girl's hand.

"I am sorry to take you away, Mairi," she said; but she was apparently not thinking of Mairi, nor of the house she was leaving, nor yet of the vehicle in which she was so strangely placed. Was she thinking of a certain wild and wet day in the far Hebrides, when a young bride stood on the decks of a great vessel, and saw the home of her childhood and the friends of her youth fade back into the desolate waste of the sea? Perhaps there may have been some unconscious influence in this picture to direct her movements at this moment, for definite resolves she had none. When Mairi told her that the cabman wanted to know whither he was to drive, she merely answered, "Oh yes, Mairi, we will go to the station;" and Mairi

added, addressing the man, "It was the Euston Station." Then they drove away.

"Are you going home?" said the young girl, looking up with a strange foreboding and sinking of the heart to the pale face and distant eyes. "Are you going home, Miss Sheila?"

"Oh yes, we are going home, Mairi," was the answer she got; but the tone in which it was uttered filled her mind with doubt and something like despair.

CHAPTER V.

A new Day breaks.

WAS this, then, the end of the fair and beautiful romance that had sprung up and blossomed so hopefully in the remote and bleak island, amid the silence of the hills and moors and the wild twilights of the north, and set round about, as it were, by the cold sea-winds and the sound of the Atlantic waves? Who could have fancied, looking at those two young folks as they wandered about the shores of the island, as they sailed on the still moonlight nights through the channels of Loch Roag, or as they sang together of an evening in the little parlour of the house at Borvabost, that all the delight and wonder of life then apparently opening out before them was so soon and so suddenly to collapse, leaving them in outer darkness and despair? All their difficulties had been got over. From one side and from another they had received generous help, friendly advice, self-sacrifice to start them on a path that seemed to be strewn with sweet-smelling flowers. And here was the end—a wretched girl, blinded and bewildered, flying from her husband's house and seeking refuge in the great world of London, careless whither she went.

Whose was the fault? Which of them had been mistaken up there in the North, laying the way open for a bitter disappointment? Or had either of them failed to carry out that unwritten contract entered into in the halcyon period of courtship, by which two young people promise to be and remain to each other all that they then appear?

Lavender, at least, had no right to complain. If the real Sheila turned out to be something different to the Sheila of his fancy, he had been abundantly warned that such would be the case. He had even accepted it as probable, and said that as the Sheila whom he might come to know must doubtless be better than the Sheila whom he had imagined, there was little danger in store for either. He would love the true Sheila even better than the creature of his brain. Had he done so? He found beside him this proud and sensitive Highland girl, full of generous impulses that craved for the practical work of helping other people, longing, with the desire of a caged bird, for the free winds and light of heaven, the sight of hills and the sound of seas; and he could not understand why she should not conform to the usages of city life. He was disappointed that she did not do so. The imaginative Sheila, who was to appear as a wonderful Sea-princess in London drawing-rooms, had disappeared now; and the real Sheila, who did not care to go with him into that society which he loved or affected to love, he had not learned to know.

And had she been mistaken in her estimate of Frank Lavender's character? At the very moment of her leaving her husband's house, if she had been asked the question, she would have turned and proudly answered, "No!" She had been disappointed—so

grievously disappointed that her heart seemed to be breaking over it; but the manner in which Frank Lavender had fallen away from the promise he had given was due, not to himself, but to the influence of the society around him. Of that she was quite assured. He had shown himself careless, indifferent, inconsiderate to the verge of cruelty; but he was not, she had convinced herself, consciously cruel, nor yet selfish, nor radically bad-hearted in any way. In her opinion, at least, he was courageously sincere, to the verge of shocking people who mistook his frankness for impudence. He was recklessly generous; he would have given the coat off his back to a beggar, at the instigation of a sudden impulse, provided he could have got into a cab before any of his friends saw him; he had rare abilities, and at times wildly ambitious dreams, not of his own glorification, but of what he would do to celebrate the beauty and the graces of the Princess whom he fancied he had married. It may seem hard of belief that this man, judging him by his actions at this time, could have had anything of thorough self-forgetfulness and manliness in his nature. But when things were at their very worst—when he appeared to the world as a self-indulgent idler, careless of a noble woman's unbounded love—when his indifference, or worse, had actually driven from his house a young wife who had especial claims on his forbearance and consideration—there were two people who still believed in Frank Lavender. They were Sheila Mackenzie and Edward Ingram; and a man's wife and his oldest friend generally know something about his real nature, its besetting temptations, its weakness, its strength, and its possibilities.

Of course Ingram was speedily made aware of all

that had happened. Lavender went home at the appointed hour to luncheon, accompanied by his three acquaintances. He had met them accidentally in the forenoon; and as Mrs. Lorraine was most particular in her inquiries about Sheila, he thought he could not do better than ask her there and then, with her mother and Lord Arthur, to have luncheon at two. What followed on his carrying the announcement to Sheila we know. He left the house, taking it for granted that there would be no trouble when he returned. Perhaps he reproached himself for having spoken so sharply; but Sheila was really very thoughtless in such matters. At two o'clock everything would be right. Sheila must see how it would be impossible to introduce a young Highland serving-maid to two fastidious ladies and the son of a great Conservative peer.

Lavender met his three friends once more and walked up to the house with them, letting them in, indeed, with his own latch-key. Passing the dining-room, he saw that the table was laid there. This was well. Sheila had been reasonable.

They went upstairs to the drawing-room. Sheila was not there. Lavender rang the bell, and bade the servant tell her mistress she was wanted.

"Mrs. Lavender has gone out, sir," said the servant.

"Oh, indeed," he said, taking the matter quite coolly. "When?"

"A quarter of an hour ago, sir. She went out with the—the young lady who came this morning."

"Very well. Let me know when luncheon is ready."

Lavender turned to his guests, feeling a little awkward, but appearing to treat the matter in a light and humorous way. He imagined that Sheila, resenting what he had said, had resolved to take Mairi away,

and find her lodgings elsewhere. Perhaps that might be done in time to let Sheila come back to receive his guests.

Sheila did not appear, however, and luncheon was announced.

"I suppose we may as well go down," said Lavender, with a shrug of his shoulders. "It is impossible to say when she may come back. She is such a good-hearted creature that she would never think of herself or her own affairs in looking after this girl from Lewis."

They went down stairs, and took their places at the table.

"For my part," said Mrs. Lorraine, "I think it is very unkind not to wait for poor Mrs. Lavender. She may come in dreadfully tired and hungry."

"But that would not vex her so much as the notion that you had waited on her account," said Sheila's husband, with a smile; and Mrs. Lorraine was pleased to hear him sometimes speak in a kindly way of the Highland girl whom he had married.

Lavender's guests were going somewhere after luncheon, and he had half promised to go with them, Mrs. Lorraine stipulating that Sheila should be induced to come also. But when luncheon was over, and Sheila had not appeared, he changed his intention. He would remain at home. He saw his three friends depart, and went into the study, and lit a cigar.

How odd the place seemed! Sheila had left no instructions about the removal of those barbaric decorations she had placed in the chamber; and here, around him, seemed to be the walls of the old-fashioned little room at Borvabost, with its big shells, its peacocks' feathers, its skins, and stuffed fish, and masses of

crimson bell-heather. Was there not, too, an odour of peat-smoke in the air? — and then his eye caught sight of the plate that still stood on the window-sill, with the ashes of the burned peat on it.

"The odd child she is!" he thought, with a smile, "to go playing at grotto-making, and trying to fancy she was up in Lewis again. I suppose she would like to let her hair down again, and take off her shoes and stockings, and go wading along the sand in search of shell-fish."

And then, somehow, his fancies went back to the old time when he had first seen and admired her wild ways, her fearless occupations by sea and shore, and the delight of active work that shone on her bright face and in her beautiful eyes. How lithe and handsome her figure used to be, in that blue dress, when she stood in the middle of the boat, her head bent back, her arms upstretched and pulling at some rope or other, and all the fine colour of exertion in the bloom of her cheeks! Then the pride with which she saw her little vessel cutting through the water—how she tightened her lips with a joyous determination as the sheets were hauled close and the gunwale of the small boat heeled over so that it almost touched the hissing and gurgling foam — how she laughed at Duncan's anxiety as she rounded some rocky point, and sent the boat spinning into the clear and smooth waters of the bay! Perhaps, after all, it was too bad to keep the poor child so long shut up in a city. She was evidently longing for a breath of sea-air, and for some brief dash of that brisk, fearless life on the sea-coast that she used to love. It was a happy life, after all; and he had himself enjoyed it, when his hands and face got browned by the sun, when he grew to

wonder how any human being could wear black garments and drink foreign wines, and smoke cigars at eighteenpence apiece, so long as frieze coats, whisky, and a briar-root pipe were procurable. How one slept up in that remote island, after all the laughing, and drinking, and singing of the evening were over! How sharp was the monition of hunger when the keen sea-air blew about your face on issuing out in the morning; and how fresh, and cool, and sweet was that early breeze, with the scent of Sheila's flowers in it! Then the long, bright day at the river-side, with the black pools rippling in the wind, and in the silence the rapid whistle of the silken line through the air, and now and again the "blob" of a big salmon rising to a fly farther down the pool. Where was there any rest like the rest of the mid-day luncheon, when Duncan had put the big fish, wrapped in rushes, under the shadow of the nearest rock, when you sat down on the warm heather, and lit your pipe, and began to inquire where you had been bitten on hands and neck by the ferocious "clegs" while you were too busy in playing a fifteen pounder to care. Then, perhaps, as you were sitting there in the warm sunlight, with all the fresh scents of the moorland around, you would hear a light footstep on the soft moss; and, turning round, here was Sheila herself, with a bright look in her pretty eyes, and a half blush on her cheek, and a friendly inquiry as to the way the fish had been behaving. Then the beautiful, strange, cool evenings on the shores of Loch Roag, with the wild, clear light still shining in the northern heavens, and the sound of the waves getting to be lonely and distant; or, still later, out in Sheila's boat, with the great yellow moon rising up over Suainabhal and Mealasabhal into a

lambent vault of violet sky; a pathway of quivering gold lying across the loch; a mild radiance glittering here and there on the spars of the small vessel, and, out there, the great Atlantic lying still and distant as in a dream. As he sat in this little room and thought of all these things, he grew to think he had not acted quite fairly to Sheila. She was so fond of that beautiful island life; and she had not even visited the Lewis since her marriage. She should go now. He would abandon that trip to the Tyrol; and as soon as arrangements could be made, they would together start for the north, and some day soon find themselves going up the steep shore to Sheila's home, with the old King of Borva standing in the porch of the house, and endeavouring to conceal his nervousness by swearing at Duncan's method of carrying the luggage.

Had not Sheila's stratagem succeeded? That pretty trick of hers, in decorating the room so as to resemble the house at Borvabost, had done all that she could have desired. But where was she?

Lavender rose hastily, and looked at his watch. Then he rang the bell, and a servant appeared.

"Did not Mrs. Lavender say when she would return?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"You don't know where she went?"

"No, sir. The young lady's luggage was put into the cab, and they drove away without leaving any message."

He scarcely dared confess to himself what fears began to assail him. He went upstairs to Sheila's room, and there everything appeared to be in its usual place, even to the smallest articles on the dressing-table. They were all there, except one. That was a

locket, too large and clumsy to be worn, which someone had given her years before she left Lewis, and in which her father's portrait had been somewhat rudely set. Just after their marriage, Lavender had taken out this portrait, touched it up a bit into something of a better likeness, and put it back; and then she had persuaded him to have a photograph of himself coloured and placed on the opposite side. This locket, open and showing both portraits, she had fixed on to a small stand, and, in ordinary circumstances, it always stood on one side of her dressing-table. The stand was there; the locket was gone.

He went down stairs again. The afternoon was drawing on. A servant came to ask him at what hour he wished to dine; he bade her wait till her mistress came home, and consult her. Then he went out.

It was a beautiful, quiet afternoon, with a warm light from the west shining over the now yellowing trees of the squares and gardens. He walked down towards Notting Hill Gate Station, endeavouring to convince himself that he was not perturbed, and yet looking somewhat anxiously at the cabs that passed. People were now coming out from their business in the city, by train, and omnibus, and hansom; and they seemed to be hurrying home in very good spirits, as if they were sure of the welcome awaiting them there. Now and again you would see a meeting — some demure young person, who had been furtively watching the railway-station, suddenly showing a brightness in her face, as she went forward to shake hands with some new arrival, and then tripping briskly away with him, her hand on his arm. There were men carrying home fish in small bags, or baskets of fruit — presents to their wives, doubtless, from town. Occasionally an

open carriage would go by, containing one grave and elderly gentleman and a group of small girls—probably his daughters, who had gone into the city to accompany their papa homeward. Why did these scenes and incidents, cheerful in themselves, seem to him to be somehow saddening, as he walked vaguely on? He knew, at least, that there was little use in returning home. There was no one in that silent house in the square. The rooms would be dark in the twilight. Probably dinner would be laid, with no one to sit down at the table. He wished Sheila had left word where she was going.

Then he bethought him of the way in which they had parted; and of the sense of fear that had struck him, the moment he left the house, and after all he had been too harsh with the child. Now, at least, he was ready to apologize to her. If only he could see Sheila coming along in one of those hansoms—if he could see, at any distance, the figure he knew so well walking towards him on the pavement—would he not instantly confess to her that he had been wrong, even grievously wrong, and beg her to forgive him? She should have it all her own way about going up to Lewis. He would cast aside this Society-life he had been living, and, to please her, would go in for any sort of work or amusement of which she approved. He was so anxious, indeed, to put these virtuous resolutions into force, that he suddenly turned and walked rapidly back to the house, with the wild hope that Sheila might have already come back.

The windows were dark—the curtains were yet drawn; and by this time the evening had come on, and the lamps in the square had been lit. He let himself into the house by his latch-key. He walked

into all the rooms, and up into Sheila's room; everything remained as he had left it. The white cloth glimmered in the dusk of the dining-room, and the light of the lamp outside in the street touched here and there the angles of the crystal and showed the pale colours of the glasses. The clock on the mantlepiece ticked in the silence. If Sheila had been lying dead in that small room up-stairs, the house could not have appeared more silent and solemn.

He could not bear this horrible solitude. He called one of the servants, and left a message for Sheila, if she came in in the interval, that he would be back at ten o'clock; then he went out, got into a hansom, and drove down to his club in St. James's Street.

Most of the men were dining; the other rooms were almost deserted. He did not care to dine just then. He went into the library; it was occupied by an old gentleman who was fast asleep in an easy-chair. He went into the billiard-rooms, in the vague hope that some exciting game might be going on; there was not a soul in the place, the gases were down, and an odour of stale smoke pervaded the dismal chambers. Should he go to the theatre? His sitting there would be a mockery, while this vague and terrible fear was present to his heart. Or go down to see Ingram, as had been his wont in previous hours of trouble? He dared not go near Ingram without some more definite news about Sheila. In the end, he went out into the open air, as if he were in danger of being stifled; and, walking indeterminately on, found himself once more at his own house.

The place was still quite dark; he knew before entering that Sheila had not returned, and he did not

seem to be surprised. It was now long after their ordinary dinner-hour. When he went into the house he bade the servants light the gas and bring up dinner; he would himself sit down at this solitary table, if only for the purpose of finding occupation and passing this terrible time of suspense.

It never occurred to him, as it might have occurred to him at one time, that Sheila had made some blunder somewhere and been unavoidably detained. He did not think of any possible repetition of her adventures in Richmond Park. He was too conscious of the probable reason of Sheila's remaining away from her own home; and yet, from minute to minute, he fought with that consciousness, and sought to prove to himself that, after all, she would soon be heard driving up to the door. He ate his dinner in silence; and then drew a chair up to the fire and lit a cigar.

For the first time in his life he was driven to go over the events that had occurred since his marriage, and to ask himself how it had all come about that Sheila and he were not as they once had been. He recalled the early days of their friendship at Borva; the beautiful period of their courtship; the appearance of the young wife in London; and the close relegation of Sheila to the domestic affairs of the house, while he had chosen for himself other companions, other interests, other aims. There was no attempt at self-justification in those communings, but an effort, sincere enough in its way, to understand how all this had happened. He sat and dreamed there, before the warmth of the fire, with the slow and monotonous ticking of the clock unconsciously acting on his brain. In time the silence, the warmth, the monotonous sound, produced their natural effects, and he fell fast asleep.

He awoke with a start. The small silvertoned bell on the mantelpiece had struck the hour of twelve. He looked around, and knew that the evil had come upon him: for Sheila had not returned, and all his most dreadful fears of that evening were confirmed. Sheila had gone away and left him—whither had she gone?

Now there was no more indecision in his actions. He got his hat, plunged into the cold night air, and finding a hansom, bade the man drive as hard as he could go down to Sloane Street. There was a light in Ingram's windows, which were on the ground-floor; he tapped with his stick on one of the panes—an old signal that had been in constant use when he and Ingram were close companions and friends. Ingram came to the door and opened it; the light of a lamp glared in on his face.

"Hillo, Lavender!" he said, in a tone of surprise.

The other could not speak; but he went into the house, and Ingram, shutting the door and following him, found that the man's face was deadly pale.

"Sheila——" he said, and stopped,

"Well, what about her?" said Ingram, keeping quite calm, but with wild fancies about some terrible accident almost stopping the pulsation of his heart.

"Sheila has gone away."

Ingram did not seem to understand.

"Sheila has gone away, Ingram," said Lavender, in an excited way. "You don't know anything about it? You don't know where she has gone? What am I to do, Ingram—how am I to find her? Good God, don't you understand what I tell you? And now it is past midnight, and my poor girl may be wandering about the streets."

He was walking up and down the room, paying almost no attention, in his excitement, to the small sallow-faced man, who stood quite quiet, a trifle afraid, perhaps, but with his heart full of a blaze of anger.

"She has gone away from your house," he said, slowly. "What made her do that?"

"I did," said Lavender, in a hurried way. "I have acted like a brute to her—that is true enough. You needn't say anything to me, Ingram; I feel myself far more guilty than anything you could say—you may heap reproaches on me afterwards—but tell me, Ingram, what am I to do. You know what a proud spirit she has—who can tell what she might do? She wouldn't go home—she would be too proud—she may have gone and drowned herself——"

"If you don't control yourself, and tell me what has happened, how am I to help you?" said Ingram, stiffly; and yet disposed somehow—perhaps for the sake of Sheila, perhaps because he saw that the young man's self-embarrassment and distress were genuine enough—not to be too rough with him.

"Well, you know Mairi," said Lavender, still walking up and down the room in an excited way: "Sheila had got up the girl here without telling me—some friends of mine were coming home to luncheon—we had some disagreement about Mairi being present—and then Sheila said something about not remaining in the house if Mairi did not—something of that sort. I don't know what it was, but I know it was all my fault; and if she has been driven from the house I did it—that is true enough. And where do you think she has gone, Ingram? If I could only see her for three minutes, I would explain everything; I would tell her how sorry I am for everything that has happened, and

she would see, when she went back, how everything would be right again. I had no idea she would go away. It was mere peevishness that made me object to Mairi meeting those people; and I had no idea that Sheila would take it so much to heart. Now tell me what you think should be done, Ingram—all I want is to see her just for three minutes to tell her it was all a mistake, and that she will never have to fear anything like that again."

Ingram heard him out, and said, with some precision—

"Do you mean to say that you fancy all this trouble is to be got over that way? Do you know so little of Sheila, after the time you have been married to her, as to imagine that she has taken this step out of some momentary caprice, and that a few words of apology and promise will cause her to rescind it? You must be crazed, Lavender; or else you are actually as ignorant of the nature of that girl as you were up in the Highlands."

The young man seemed to calm down his excitement and impatience, but it was because of a new fear that had struck him, and that was visible in his face.

"Do you think she will never come back, Ingram?" he said, looking aghast.

"I don't know. She may not. At all events, you may be quite sure that, once having resolved to leave your house, she is not to be pacified and cajoled by a few phrases and a promise of repentance on your part. That is quite sure. And what is quite as sure is this, that if you knew just now where she was, the most foolish thing you could do would be to go and see her——"

"But I *must go* and see her—I must find her out,

Ingram," he said, passionately. "I don't care what becomes of me. If she won't go back home, so much the worse for me; but I *must* find her out, and know that she is safe! Think of it, Ingram—perhaps she is walking about the streets somewhere at this moment —and you know her proud spirit—if she were to go near the river——"

"She won't go near the river," said Ingram, quietly. "And she won't be walking about the streets. She is either in the Scotch mail-train, going up to Glasgow, or else she has got some lodgings somewhere, along with Mairi. Has she any money?"

"No," said Lavender. And then he thought for a minute. "There was some money her father gave her in case she might want it at a pinch—she may have that, I hope she has that. I was to have given her money to-morrow morning. But hadn't I better go to the police-stations, and see, just by way of precaution, that she has not been heard of? I may as well do that as nothing. I could not go home to that empty house. I could not sleep."

"Sheila is a sensible girl; she is safe enough," said Ingram. "And if you don't care about going home, you may as well remain here. I can give you a room up-stairs when you want it. In the meantime, if you will pull a chair to the table, and calm yourself, and take it for granted that you will soon be assured of Sheila's safety, I will tell you what I think you should do. Here is a cigar to keep you occupied; there is whisky and cold water back there, if you like; you will do no good by punishing yourself in small matters; for your trouble is likely to be serious enough, I can tell you, before you get Sheila back, if ever you get her back. Take the chair with the cushion."

It was so like the old days when these two used to be companions! Many and many a time had the younger man come down to these lodgings, with all his troubles, and wild impulses, and pangs of contrition ready to be revealed; and then Ingram, concealing the liking he had for the lad's generous waywardness, his brilliant and facile cleverness, and his dashes of honest self-depreciation, would gravely lecture him, and put him right, and send him off comforted. Frank Lavender had changed much since then. The handsome boy had grown into a man of the world; there was less self-revelation in his manner, and he was less sensitive to the opinions and criticisms of his old friend; but Ingram, who was not prone to idealism of any sort, had never ceased to believe that this change was but superficial, and that, in different circumstances and with different aims, Lavender might still fulfil the best promise of his youth.

"You have been a good friend to me, Ingram," he said, with a hot blush, "and I have treated you as badly as I have treated——By Jove, what a chance I had at one time!"

He was looking back on all the fair pictures his imagination had drawn while yet Sheila and he were wandering about that island in the northern seas.

"You had," said Ingram, decisively. "At one time I thought you the most fortunate man in the world. There was nothing left for you to desire, as far as I could see. You were young, and strong, with plenty of good spirits and sufficient ability to earn yourself an honourable living, and you had won the love of the most beautiful and best-hearted woman I have known. You never seemed to me to know what that meant. Men *marry* women—there is no difficulty about

that; and you can generally get an amiable sort of person to become your wife, and have a sort of affection for you, and so on. But how many have bestowed on them the pure and exalted passion of a young and innocent girl, who is ready to worship with all the fervour of a warmly imaginative and emotional nature the man she has chosen to love? And suppose he is young, too, and capable of understanding all the tender sentiments of a high-spirited, sensitive, and loyal woman, and suppose that he fancies himself as much in love with her as she with him? These conditions are not often fulfilled, I can tell you. It is a happy fluke when they are. Many a day ago I told you that you should consider yourself more fortunate than if you had been made an Emperor; and, indeed, it seemed to me that you had everything in the shape of worldly happiness easily within your reach. How you came to kick away the ball from your feet—well—God only knows. The thing is inconceivable to me. You are sitting here as you used to sit two or three years ago; and in the interval you have had every chance in life; and now if you are not the most wretched man in London, you ought at least to be the most ashamed and repentant."

Lavender's head was buried in his hands; he did not speak.

"And it is not only your own happiness you have destroyed. When you saw that girl first, she was as light-hearted and contented with her lot as any human being could be. From one week's end to the other not the slightest care disturbed her mind. And then, when she entrusted her whole life to you—when she staked her faith in human nature on you, and gave you all the treasures of hope and reverence, and love

that lay in her pure and innocent soul—my God! what have you done with these? It is not that you have shamed and insulted her as a wife, and driven her out of her home—there are other homes than yours where she would be welcome a thousand times over—but you have destroyed her belief in everything she had taught herself to trust, you have outraged the tenderest sentiments of her heart, you have killed her faith as well as ruined her life. I talk plainly. I cannot do otherwise. If I help you now, don't imagine I condone what you have done—I would cut off my right hand first. For Sheila's sake, I will try to help you."

He stopped just then, however, and ckecked the indignation that had got the better of his ordinarily restrained manner and curt speech. The man before him was crying bitterly, his face hidden in his hands.

"Look here, Lavender," he said, presently. "I don't want to be hard on you. I tell you plainly what I think of your conduct, so that no delusions may exist between us. And I will say this for you, that the only excuse you have——"

"There is no excuse," said the other, sadly enough. "I have no excuse, and I know it."

"The only thing, then, you can say in mitigation of what you have done is that you never seem to have understood the girl whom you married. You started with giving her a fancy character when first you went to the Lewis; and once you had got the bit in your teeth, there was no stopping you. If you seek now to get Sheila back to you, the best thing you can do, I presume, would be to try to see her as she is, to win her regard that way, to abandon that operatic business, and learn to know her as a thoroughly good woman, who has her own ways and notions about

things, and who has a very definite character underlying that extreme gentleness which she fancies to be one of her duties. The child did her dead best to accommodate herself to your idea of her, and failed. When she would rather have been living a brisk and active life in the country, or by the sea-side—running wild about a hill-side, or reading strange stories in the evening, or nursing some fisherman's child that had got ill—you had her dragged into a sort of society with which she had no sympathy whatever. And the odd thing to me is that you yourself seemed to be making an effort that way! You did not always devote yourself to fashionable life. What became of all your old ambitions you used to talk about in the very chair you are now sitting in?"

"Is there any hope of my getting Sheila back?" he said, looking up at last. There was a vague and bewildered look in his eyes. He seemed incapable of thinking of anything but that.

"I don't know," said Ingram. "But one thing is certain—you will never get her back to repeat the experiment that has just ended in this desperate way."

"I should not ask that," he said, hurriedly. "I should not ask that at all. If I could but see her for a moment, I would ask her to tell me everything she wanted—everything she demanded as conditions—and I would obey them all. I will promise to do everything that she wishes."

"If you saw her, you could give her nothing but promises," said Ingram, quietly. "Now, what if you were to try to do what you know she wishes, and then go to her?"

"You mean——," said Lavender, glancing up with another startled look on his face. "You don't mean

that I am to remain away from her a long time—go into banishment, as it were—and then, some day, come back to Sheila, and beg her to forget all that happened long before."

"I mean something very like that," said Ingram, with composure. "I don't know that it would be successful. I have no means of ascertaining what Sheila would think of such a project—whether she would think that she could ever live with you again."

Lavender seemed fairly stunned by the possibility of Sheila's resolving never to see him again; and began to recall what Ingram had many a time said about the strength of purpose she could show when occasion needed.

"If her faith in you is wholly destroyed, your case is hopeless. A woman may cling to her belief in a man, through good report and evil report; but if she once loses it, she never recovers it. But there is this hope for you. I know very well that Sheila had a much more accurate notion of you than ever you had of her; and I happen to know, also, that at the very time when you were most deeply distressing her, here in London, she held the firm conviction that your conduct towards her—your habits, your very self—would alter if you could only be persuaded to get out of the life you have been leading. That was true, at least, up to the time of your leaving Brighton. She believed in you then. She believed that if you were to cut Society altogether, and go and live a useful and hard-working life somewhere, you would soon become once more the man she fell in love with up in Lewis. Perhaps she was mistaken—I don't say anything about it myself."

The terribly cool way in which Ingram talked—

separating, defining, exhibiting, so that he and his companion should get as near as possible to what he believed to be the truth of the situation—was oddly in contrast with the blind and passionate yearning of the other for some glimpse of hope. His whole nature seemed to go out in a cry to Sheila, that she would come back and give him a chance of atoning for the past. At length he rose. He looked strangely haggard, and his eyes scarcely seemed to see the things around him.

"I must go home," he said.

Ingram saw that he merely wanted to get outside and walk about in order to find some relief from this anxiety and unrest, and said—

"You ought, I think, to stop here and go to bed. But if you would rather go home, I will walk up with you, if you like."

When the two men went out, the night-air smelt sweet and moist, for rain had fallen, and the city trees were still dripping with the wet and rustling in the wind. The weather had changed suddenly, and now, in the deep blue overhead, they knew the clouds were passing swiftly by. Was it the coming light of the morning that seemed to give depth and richness to that dark blue vault, while the pavements of the streets and the houses grew vaguely distinct and grey? Suddenly in turning the corner into Piccadilly, they saw the moon appear in a rift of those passing clouds; but it was not the moonlight that shed this pale and wan greyness down the lonely streets. It is just at this moment, when the dawn of the new day begins to tell, that a great city seems at its deadest; and in the profound silence and amid the strange transformations of the cold and growing light, a man is thrown

in upon himself, and holds communion with himself, as though he and his own thoughts were all that was left in the world. Not a word passed between the two men; and Lavender, keenly sensitive to all such impressions, and now and again shivering slightly, either from cold or nervous excitement, walked blindly along the deserted streets, seeing far other things than the tall houses, and the drooping trees, and the growing light of the sky.

It seemed to him at this moment that he was looking at Sheila's funeral. There was a great stillness in that small house at Borvabost. There was a boat —Sheila's own boat—down at the shore there; and there were two or three figures in black in it. The day was grey and rainy; the sea washed along the melancholy shores; the far hills were hidden in mist. And now he saw some people come out of the house into the rain, and the bronzed and bearded men had oars with them, and on the crossed oars there was a coffin placed. They went down the hill-side. They put the coffin in the stern of the boat; and in absolute silence—except for the wailing of the women—they pulled away down the dreary Loch Roag till they came to the Island where the burial-ground is. They carried the coffin up to that small enclosure, with its rank grass growing green, and the rain falling on the rude stones and memorials. How often had he leaned on that low stone wall, and read the strange inscriptions, in various tongues, over the graves of mariners from distant countries who had met with their death on this rocky coast. Had not Sheila herself pointed out to him, with a sad air, how many of these memorials bore the words "who was drowned;" and that, too, was the burden of the rudely-spelt legends beginning

with "Hier ruht in Gott," or "Her under hviler stovit," and sometimes ending with the pathetic "Wunderschön ist unsre Hoffnung." The fishermen brought the coffin to the newly-made grave; the women standing back a bit, old Scarlett MacDonald stroking Mairi's hair, and bidding the girl control her frantic grief, though the old woman herself could hardly speak for her tears and her lamentations. He could read the words "Sheila Mackenzie" on the small silver plate: she had been taken away from all association with him and his name. And who was this old man with the white hair and the white beard, whose hands were tightly clenched, and his lips firm, and a look as of death in the sunken and wild eyes? Mackenzie was grey a year before——

"Ingram," he said, suddenly, and his voice startled his companion, "do you think it is possible to make Sheila happy again?"

"How can I tell?" said Ingram.

"You used to know everything she could wish—everything she was thinking about. If you find her out now, will you get to know? Will you see what I can do—not by asking her to come back, not by trying to get back my own happiness—but anything, it does not matter what it is, I can do for her? If she would rather not see me again, I will stay away. Will you ask her, Ingram?"

"We have got to find her first," said his companion.

"A young girl like that," said Lavender, taking no heed of the objection, "surely she cannot always be unhappy. She is so young and beautiful, and takes so much interest in many things—surely she may have a happy life."

"She might have had."

"I don't mean with me," said Lavender, with his haggard face looking still more haggard in the increasing light. "I mean anything that can be done—any way of life that will make her comfortable and contented again—anything that I can do for that, will you try to find it out, Ingram?"

"Oh yes, I will," said the other, who had been thinking with much foreboding of all these possibilities ever since they left Sloane Street, his only gleam of hope being a consciousness that this time at least there could be no doubt of Frank Lavender's absolute sincerity, of his remorse, and his almost morbid craving to make reparation if that were still possible.

They reached the house at last. There was a dim orange-coloured light shining in the passage. Lavender went on, and threw open the small room which Sheila had adorned, asking Ingram to follow him. How wild and strange this chamber looked, with the wan glare of the dawn shining in on its barbaric decorations from the sea-coast—on the shells, and skins, and feathers that Sheila had placed around! That white light of the morning was now shining everywhere into the silent and desolate house. Lavender found Ingram a bed-room; and then he turned away, not knowing what to do. He looked into Sheila's room: there were dresses, bits of finery, and what not, that he knew so well; but there was no light breathing audible in the silent and empty chamber. He shut the door as reverently as though he were shutting it on the dead; and went down-stairs and threw himself almost fainting with despair and fatigue on a sofa, while the world outside awoke to a new day, with all its countless and joyous activities and duties.

CHAPTER VI.

A Surprise.

THERE was no letter from Sheila in the morning; and Lavender, so soon as the post had come and gone, went up to Ingram's room and woke him.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Ingram," he said, "but I am going to Lewis. I shall catch the train to Glasgow at ten."

"And what do you want to get to Lewis for?" said Ingram, starting up. "Do you think Sheila would go straight back to her own people with all this humiliation upon her? And supposing she is not there, how do you propose to meet old Mackenzie?"

"I am not afraid of meeting any man," said Lavender; "I want to know where Sheila is. And if I see Mackenzie, I can only tell him frankly everything that has happened. He is not likely to say anything of me half as bad as what I think of myself."

"Now listen," said Ingram, sitting up in bed, with his brown beard and greyish hair in a considerably dishevelled condition. "Sheila may have gone home, but it isn't likely. If she has not, your taking the story up there, and spreading it abroad, would prepare a great deal of pain for her when she might go back at some future time. But suppose you want to make sure that she has not gone to her father's house. She could not have got down to Glasgow sooner than this morning, by last night's train, you know. It is to-morrow morning, not this morning, that the Stornoway steamer starts; and she would be certain to go direct to it at the Glasgow Broomielaw, and go round the Mull of Cantyre instead of catching it up at Oban, because she knows the people in the boat, and she

and Mairi would be among friends. If you really want to know whether she has gone north, perhaps you could do no better than run down to Glasgow to-day, and have a look at the boat that starts to-morrow morning. I would go with you myself, but I can't escape the office to-day."

Lavender agreed to do this; and was about to go. But before he bade his friend good-bye, he lingered for a second or two in a hesitating way, and then he said—

"Ingram, you were speaking the other night of your going up to Borva. If you should go——"

"Of course I shan't go," said the other, promptly. "How could I face Mackenzie when he began to ask me about Sheila? No, I cannot go to Borva while this affair remains in its present condition; and, indeed, Lavender, I mean to stop in London till I see you out of your trouble somehow."

"You are heaping coals of fire on my head."

"Oh, don't look at it that way. If I can be of any help to you, I shall expect, this time, to have a return for it."

"What do you mean?"

"I will tell you when we get to know something of Sheila's intentions."

And so Frank Lavender found himself once more, as in the old times, in the Euston Station, with the Scotch mail ready to start, and all manner of folks bustling about with that unnecessary activity which betokens the excitement of a holiday. What a strange holiday was his! He got into a smoking-carriage in order to be alone; and he looked out on the people who were bidding their friends good-bye. Some of them were not very pretty; many of them were ordi-

nary, insignificant, commonplace-looking folks; but it was clear that they had those about them who loved them and thought much of them. There was one man whom, in other circumstances, Lavender would have dismissed with contempt as an excellent specimen of the unmitigated cad. He wore a white waistcoat, purple gloves, and a green sailor's knot with a diamond in it; and there was a cheery, vacuous, smiling expression on his round face as he industriously smoked a cheroot and made small jokes to the friends who had come to see him off. One of them was a young woman, not very good-looking, perhaps, who did not join in the general hilarity: and it occurred to Lavender that the jovial man with the cheroot was perhaps cracking his little jokes to keep up her spirits. At all events he called her "my good lass" from time to time, and patted her on the shoulder, and was very kind to her. And when the guard came up, and bade everybody get in, the man kissed the girl, and shook hands with her, and bade her good-bye; and then she, moved by some sudden impulse, caught his face in both her hands and kissed him once on each cheek. It was a ridiculous scene. People who wear green ties with diamond pins care nothing for decorum. And yet Lavender, when he averted his eyes from this parting, could not help recalling what Ingram had been saying the night before, and wondered whether this outrageous person, with his abominable decorations and his genial grin, might not be more fortunate than many a great statesman, or warrior, or monarch.

He turned round to find the cad beside him; and presently the man, with an abounding good nature, began to converse with him, and explained that it was 'igh 'oliday with him, for that he had got a pass to

travel first-class as far as Carlisle. He hoped they would have a jolly time of it together. He explained the object of his journey in the frankest possible fashion; made a kindly little joke upon the hardship of parting with one's sweetheart; said that a faint heart never won fair lady, and that it was no good crying over spilt milk. She would be all right, and precious glad to see him back in three weeks' time, and he meant to bring her a present that would be good for sore eyes.

"Perhaps you're a married man, sir, and got past all them games?" said the cad, cheerily.

"Yes, I am married," said Lavender, coldly.

"And you're going further than Carlisle, you say, sir? I'll be sworn the good lady is up somewhere in that direction, and she won't be disappointed when she sees you—oh no! Scotch, sir?"

"I am not Scotch," said Lavender, curtly.

"And she?"

Should he have to throw the man out of the window?

"Yes."

"The Scotch are a strange race—very," said the genial person, producing a brandy flask. "They drink a trifle, don't they; and yet they keep their wits about them if you've dealings with them. A very strange race of people in my opinion—very. Know the story of the master who fancied his man was drunk? 'Donald, you're trunk,' says he. 'It's a tam lee,' says Donald. 'Donald, ye ken ye're trunk!' says the master. 'Ah ken ah wish to Kott ah wass!' says Donald. Good story, ain't it, sir?"

Lavender had heard the remarkable old joke a hundred times; but just at this moment there was

something odd in this vulgar person suddenly imitating, and imitating very well, the Highland accent. Had he been away up in the north: or had he merely heard the story related by one who had been? Lavender dared not ask, however, for fear of prolonging a conversation in which he had no wish to join. Indeed, to get rid of the man, he shoved a whole bundle of the morning papers into his hands.

"What's your opinion of politics at present, sir?" observed his friend, in an off-hand way.

"I haven't any," said Lavender, compelled to take back one of the newspapers, and open it.

"I think, myself, they're in a bad state. That's my opinion. There ain't a man among 'em who knows how to keep down those people. That's my opinion, sir. What do you think?"

"Oh, I think so, too," said Lavender. "You'll find a good article in that paper on University Tests."

The cheery person looked rather blank.

"I would like to hear your opinion about 'em, sir," he said. "It ain't much good reading only one side of the question; but when you can talk about it and discuss it, now——"

"I am sorry I can't oblige you," said Lavender, goaded into making some desperate effort to release himself. "I am suffering from relaxed throat at present. My doctor has warned me against talking too much."

"I beg your pardon, sir. You don't seem very well—perhaps the throat comes with a little feverishness, you see—a cold, in fact. Now, if I was you, I'd try tannin lozenges for the throat. They're uncommon good for the throat; and a little quinine for the general system—that would put you as right as a

fiver. I tried it myself when I was down in 'Ampshire last year. And you wouldn't find a drop of this brandy a bad thing either, if you don't mind rowing in the same boat as myself."

Lavender declined the proffered flask, and subsided behind a newspaper. His fellow-traveller lit another cheroot, took up Bradshaw, and settled himself in a corner.

Had Sheila come up this very line some dozen hours before? Lavender asked himself, as he looked out on the hills, and valleys, and woods of Buckinghamshire. Had the throbbing of the engine and the rattle of the wheels kept the piteous eyes awake all through the dark night, until the pale dawn showed the girl a wild vision of northern hills and moors, telling her she was getting near to her own country? Not thus had Sheila proposed to herself to return home on the first holiday-time that should occur to them both. He began to think of his present journey as it might have been in other circumstances. Would she have remembered any of those pretty villages which she saw one early morning, long ago, when they were bathed in sunshine, and scarcely awake to the new day? Would she be impatient at the delays at the stations, and anxious to hurry on to Westmoreland and Dumfries, to Glasgow, and Oban, and Skye, and then from Stornoway across the island to the little inn at Garra-na-hina? Here, as he looked out of the window, the first indication of the wilder country became visible in the distant Berkshire hills. Close at hand the country lay green and bright under a brilliant sun; but over there in the east, some heavy clouds darkened the landscape, and the far hills seemed to be placed amid a gloomy stretch of moorland. Would

not Sheila have been thrilled by this glimpse of the coming north? She would have fancied that greater mountains lay far behind these rounded slopes, hidden in mist. She would have imagined that no human habitations were near those rising plains of sombre hue, where the red-deer and the fox ought to dwell. And in her delight at getting away from the fancied brightness of the south, would she not have been exceptionally grateful and affectionate towards himself, and striven to please him with her tender ways?

It was not a cheerful journey—this lonely trip to the North. Lavender got to Glasgow that night; and next morning he went down, long before any passengers could have thought of arriving, to the *Clansman*. He did not go near the big steamer, for he was known to the captain and the steward; but he hung about the quays, watching each person who went on board. Sheila certainly was not among the passengers by the *Clansman*.

But she might have gone to Greenock, and waited for the steamer there. Accordingly, after the *Clansman* had started on her voyage, he went into a neighbouring hotel and had some breakfast, after which he crossed the bridge to the station, and took rail for Greenock, where he arrived some time before the *Clansman* made her appearance. He went down to the quay. It was yet early morning, and a cool fresh breeze was blowing in across the broad waters of the Firth, where the sunlight was shining on the white sails of the yachts and on the dipping and screaming sea-gulls. Far away beyond the pale blue mountains opposite lay the wonderful net-work of sea-loch and island through which one had to pass to get to the distant Lewis. How gladly, at this moment, would he

have stepped on board the steamer, with Sheila, and put out on that gleaming plain of sea, knowing that by and by they would sail into Stornoway harbour and find the waggonette there. They would not hasten the voyage. She had never been round the Mull of Cantyre; and so he would sit by her side, and show her the wild tides meeting there, and the long jets of white foam shooting up the great wall of rocks. He would show her the pale coast of Ireland; and then they would see Islay, of which she had many a ballad and story. They would go through the narrow Sound that is overlooked by the gloomy mountains of Jura. They would see the distant islands where the chief of Colonsay is still mourned for on the still evenings, by the hapless mermaiden who sings her wild song across the sea. They would keep wide of the dangerous currents of Corryvreckan; and by and by they would sail into the harbour of Oban, the beautiful sea-town where Sheila first got a notion of the greatness of the world lying outside of her native island.

What if she were to come down now from this busy little seaport, which lay under a pale blue smoke, and come out upon this pier to meet the free sunlight and the fresh sea-air blowing all about? Surely at a great distance he could recognize the proud, light step, and the proud, sad face. Would she speak to him; or go past him, with firm lips and piteous eyes, to wait for the great steamer that was now coming along out of the eastern mist? Lavender glanced vaguely round the quays and the thoroughfares leading to them; but there was no one like Sheila there. In the distance he could hear the throbbing of the *Clansman's* engines, as the big steamer came on through the white plain. The sun was warmer now

on the bright waters of the Firth; and the distant haze over the pale blue mountains beyond had grown more luminous. Small boats went by; with here and there a yachtsman, scarlet-capped, and in white costume, taking a leisurely breakfast on deck. The seagulls circled about, or dipped down on the waters, or chased each other with screams and cries. Then the *Clansman* sailed into the quay, and there was a flinging of ropes, and general hurry and bustle, while people came crowding round the gangways, calling out to each other in every variety of dialect and accent.

Sheila was not there. He lingered about, and patiently waited for the starting of the steamer, not knowing how long she ordinarily remained at Greenock. He was in no hurry, indeed; for after the vessel had gone, he found himself with a whole day before him, and with no fixed notion as to how it could be passed.

In other circumstances, he would have been in no difficulty as to the spending of a bright forenoon and afternoon by the side of the sea. Or he could have run through to Edinburgh, and called on some artist-friends there. Or he could have crossed the Firth, and had a day's ramble among the mountains. But now that he was satisfied Sheila had not gone home, all his fancies and hopes went back to London. She was in London. And while he was glad she had not gone straight to her own people with a revelation of her wrongs, he scarcely dared speculate on what adventures and experiences might have befallen those two girls turned out into a great city, of which they were about equally ignorant.

The day passed somehow, and at night he was on his way to London. Next morning he went down to Whitehall, and saw Ingram.

"Sheila has not gone back to the Highlands, so far as I can make out," he said.

"So much the better," was the answer.

"What am I to do? She must be in London; and who knows what may befall her?"

"I cannot tell you what you should do. Of course you would like to know where she is; and I fancy she would have no objection herself to letting you know that she was all right, so long as she knew that you would not go near her. I don't think she has taken so decided a step merely for the purpose of being coaxed back again—that is not Sheila's way."

"I won't go near her," he said. "I only want to know that she is safe and well. I will do whatever she likes; but I must know where she is, and that she has come to no harm."

"Well," said Ingram, slowly, "I was talking the matter over with Mrs. Lorraine last night——"

"Does *she* know?" said Lavender, wincing somewhat.

"Certainly," Ingram answered. "I did not tell her. I had promised to go up there about something quite different, when she immediately began to tell me the news. Of course it was impossible to conceal such a thing. Don't all the servants about know?"

"I don't care who knows," said Lavender, moodily. "What does Mrs. Lorraine say about this affair?"

"Mrs. Lorraine says that it serves you right," said Ingram, bluntly.

"Thank her very much. I like candour, especially in a fair-weather friend."

"Mrs. Lorraine is a better friend to you than you imagine," Ingram said, taking no notice of the sneer. "When she thought that your going to their house

continually was annoying Sheila, she tried to put a stop to it for Sheila's sake. And now, at this very moment, she is doing her very best to find out where Sheila is; and if she succeeds, she means to go and plead your cause with the girl."

"I will not have her do anything of the kind," said Lavender, fiercely. "I will plead my own cause with Sheila. I will have forgiveness from Sheila herself alone—not brought to me by any intermeddling woman."

"You needn't call names," said Ingram, coolly. "But I confess I think you are right; and I told Mrs. Lorraine that was what you would doubtless say. In any case, she can do no harm in trying to find out where Sheila is."

"And how does she propose to succeed? Pollaky? The 'Agony' Column? Placards, or a Bellman? I tell you, Ingram, I won't have that woman meddle in my affairs—coming forward as a sister of mercy to heal the wounded—bestowing mock compassion, and laughing all the time——"

"Lavender, you are beside yourself. That woman is one of the most good-natured, shrewd, clever, and amiable women I have ever met. What has enraged you?"

"Bah! She has got hold of you too, has she? I tell you she is a rank impostor."

"An impostor!" said Ingram slowly. "I have heard a good many people called impostors. Did it ever occur to you that the blame of the imposture might possibly lie with the person imposed on? I have heard of people falling into the delusion that a certain modest and simple-minded man was a great politician or a great wit, although he had never claimed

to be anything of the kind; and then, when they found out that in truth he was just what he had pretended to be, they called out against him as an impostor. I have heard, too, of young gentlemen accusing women of imposture whose only crime was, that they did not possess qualities which they had never pretended to possess, but which the young gentlemen fancied they ought to possess. Mrs. Lorraine may be an impostor to you. I think she is a thoroughly good woman, and I know she is a very delightful companion. And if you want to know how she means to find Sheila out, I can tell you. She thinks that Sheila would probably go to an hotel, but that afterwards she would try to find lodgings with some of the people whom she had got to know through her giving them assistance. Mrs. Lorraine would like to ask your servants about the women who used to come for this help. Then, she thinks, Sheila would probably get some one of these humble friends to call for her letters, for she would like to hear from her father, and she would not care to tell him that she had left your house. There is a great deal of supposition in all this; but Mrs. Lorraine is a shrewd woman, and I would trust her instinct in such matters a long way. She is quite sure that Sheila would be too proud to tell her father, and very much averse, also, to inflicting so severe a blow on him——"

"But surely," Lavender said, hastily, "if Sheila wishes to conceal this affair for a time, she must believe it to be only temporary? She cannot propose to make the separation final?"

"That I don't know anything about. I would advise you to go and see Mrs. Lorraine."

"I *won't go and see* Mrs. Lorraine."

"Now, this is unreasonable, Lavender. You begin to fancy that Sheila had some sort of dislike to Mrs. Lorraine, founded on ignorance; and straightway you think it is your duty to go and hate the woman. Whatever you may think of her, she is willing to do you a service."

"Will you go, Ingram, and take her to those servants?"

"Certainly, I will, if you commission me to do so," said Ingram, readily.

"I suppose they all know?"

"They do."

"And everyone else?"

"I should think few of your friends would remain in ignorance of it."

"Ah, well," said Lavender, "if only I could get Sheila to overlook what is past, this once, I should not trouble my dear friends and acquaintances for their sympathy and condolence. By the time I saw them again, I fancy they would have forgotten our names."

There was no doubt of the fact that the news of Sheila's flight from her husband's house had travelled very speedily round the circle of Lavender's friends, and doubtless, in due time, it reached the ears of his aunt. At all events, Mrs. Lavender sent a message to Ingram, asking him to come and see her. When he went, he found the little, dry, hard-eyed woman in a terrible passion. She had forgotten all about Marcus Aurelius, and the composure of a philosopher, and the effect of anger on the nervous system. She was bolstered up in bed, for she had had another bad fit; but she was brisk enough in her manner and fierce enough in her language.

"Mr. Ingram," she said, the moment he had entered, "do you consider my nephew a beast?"

"I don't," he said.

"I do," she retorted.

"Then you are quite mistaken, Mrs. Lavender. Probably you have heard some exaggerated story of all this business. He has been very inconsiderate and thoughtless, certainly; but I don't believe he quite knew how sensitive his wife was; and he is very repentant now, and I know he will keep his promises."

"You would apologize for the devil," said the little old woman, frowning.

"I would try to give him his due, at all events," said Ingram, with a laugh. "I know Frank Lavender very well—I have known him for years; and I know there is good stuff in him, which may be developed in proper circumstances. After all, what is there more common than for a married man to neglect his wife? He only did unconsciously and thoughtlessly what heaps of men do deliberately."

"You are making me angry," said Mrs. Lavender, in a severe voice.

"I don't think it fair to expect men to be demigods," Ingram said, carelessly. "I never met any demigods myself; they don't live in my neighbourhood. Perhaps if I had had some experience of a batch of them, I should be more censorious of other people. If you set up Frank for a Bayard, is it his fault, or yours?"

"I am not going to be talked out of my common sense, and me on my death-bed," said the old lady, impatiently, and yet with some secret hope that Ingram would go on talking and amuse her. "I won't have you say he is anything but a stupid and un-

grateful boy, who married a wife far too good for him. He is worse than that—he is much worse than that; but as this may be my death-bed, I will keep a civil tongue in my head."

"I thought you did not like his wife very much?" said Ingram.

"I am not bound to like her because I think badly of him, am I? She was not a bad sort of girl, after all—temper a little stiff, perhaps; but she was honest. It did one's eyes good to look at her bright face. Yes, she was a good sort of creature in her way. But when she ran off from him, why didn't she come to me?"

"Perhaps you never encouraged her."

"Encouragement! Where ought a married woman go to but to her husband's relatives? If she cannot stay with him, let her take the next best substitute. It was her duty to come to me."

"If Sheila had fancied it to be her duty, she would have come here, at any cost."

"What do you mean, Mr. Ingram?" said Mrs. Lavender, severely.

"Well, supposing she didn't like you——" he was beginning to say, cautiously, when she sharply interrupted him.

"She didn't like me, eh?"

"I said nothing of the kind. I was about to say that if she had thought it her duty to come here, she would have come, in any circumstances."

"She might have done worse. A young woman risks a great deal in running away from her husband's home. People will talk. Who is to make people believe just the version of the story that the husband or wife would prefer?"

"And what does Sheila care," said Ingram, with a

hot flush in his face, "for the belief of a lot of idle gossips and slanderers?"

"My dear Mr. Ingram," said the old lady, "you are not a woman, and you don't know the bother one has to look after one's reputation. But that is a question not likely to interest you. Let us talk of something else. Do you know why I wanted you to come and see me to-day?"

"I am sure I don't."

"I mean to leave you all my money."

He stared. She did not appear to be joking. Was it possible that her rage against her nephew had carried her to this extreme resolve?

"Oh!" he stammered; "but I won't have it, Mrs. Lavender."

"But you'll have to have it," said the little old woman, severely. "You are a poor man. You could make good use of my money—better than a charity board—that would starve the poor with a penny out of each shilling, and spend the other eleven pence in treating their friends to flower-shows and dinners. Do you think I mean to leave my money to such people? You shall have it. I think you would look very well driving a mail-phaeton in the Park; and I suppose you would give up your pipes and your philosophy, and your bachelor walks into the country. You would marry, of course—every man is bound to make a fool of himself that way, as soon as he gets enough money to do it with. But perhaps you might come across a clever and sensible woman, who would look after you, and give you your own way while having her own. Only don't marry a fool. Whatever you do, don't marry a fool, or all your philosophers won't make the house bearable to you."

"I am not likely to marry anybody, Mrs. Lavender," said Ingram, carelessly.

"Is there no woman you know whom you would care to marry?"

"Oh," he said, "there is one woman—yes—who seems to me about everything that a man could wish; but the notion of my marrying her is absurd. If I had known in time, don't you see, that I should ever think of such a thing, I should have begun years ago to dye my hair. I can't begin now. Grey hair inspires reverence, I believe; but it is a bad thing to go courting with."

"You must not talk foolishly," said the little old lady, with a frown. "Do you think a sensible woman wants to marry a boy, who will torment her with his folly, and his empty head, and his running after a dozen different women? Grey hair! If you think grey hair is a bad thing to go courting with, I will give you something better. I will put something in your hand that will make the young lady forget your grey hair. Oh, of course, you will say that she cannot be tempted; that she despises money. If so, so much the better; but I have known more women than you, and my hair is greyer than yours; and you will find that a little money won't stand in the way of your being accepted."

He had made some gesture of protest, not against her speaking of his possible marriage, which scarcely interested him, so remote was the possibility, but against her returning to this other proposal. And when he saw the old woman really meant to do this thing, he found it necessary to declare himself explicitly on the point.

"Oh, don't imagine, Mrs. Lavender," he said, "that

I have any wild horror of money, or that I suppose anybody else would have. I should like to have five times, or ten times as much as you seem generously disposed to give me. But here is the point, you see. I am a vain person. I am very proud of my own opinion of myself; and, if I acceded to what you propose—if I took your money—I suppose I should be driving about in that fine phaeton you speak of. That is very good—I like driving, and I should be pleased with the appearance of the trap and the horses. But what do you fancy I should think of myself—what would be my opinion of my own nobleness, and generosity, and humanity—if I saw Sheila Mackenzie walking by on the pavement, without any carriage to drive in, perhaps without a notion as to where she was going to get her dinner? I should be a great hero to myself then, shouldn't I?"

"Oh, Sheila again!" said the old woman, in a tone of vexation. "I can't imagine what there is in that girl to make men rave so about her. That Jew-boy is become a thorough nuisance—you would fancy she had just stepped down out of the clouds to present him with a gold harp, and that he couldn't look up to her face. And you are just as bad. You are worse—for you don't blow it off in steam. Well, there need be no difficulty. I meant to leave the girl in your charge. You take the money and look after her—I know she won't starve. Take it in trust for her, if you like."

"But that is a fearful responsibility, Mrs. Lavender," he said, in dismay. "She is a married woman. Her husband is the proper person——"

"I tell you I won't give him a farthing!" she said, with a sudden sharpness that startled him. "Not a

farthing! If he wants money, let him work for it, as other people do; and then, when he has done that, if he is to have any of my money, he must be beholden for it to his wife and to you."

"Do you think that Sheila would accept anything that she would not immediately hand over to him?"

"Then he must come first to you."

"I have no wish to inflict humiliation on anyone," said Ingram, stiffly. "I don't wish to play the part of a little Providence, and mete out punishment in that way. I might have to begin with myself."

"Now, don't be foolish," said the old lady, with a menacing composure. "I give you fair warning. The next fit will do for me. If you don't care to take my money, and keep it in trust for this girl you profess to care so much about, I will leave it to found an institution. And I have a good idea for an institution, mind you. I mean to teach people what they should eat and drink, and the various effects of food on various constitutions."

"It is an important subject," Ingram admitted.

"Is it not? What is the use of giving people laborious information about the idle fancies of generations that lived ages before they were born, while you are letting them poison their system, and lay up for themselves a fearfully painful old age, by the continuous use of unsuitable food? That book you gave me, Mr. Ingram, is a wonderful book; but it gives you little consolation if you know another fit is coming on. And what is the good of knowing about Epictetus, and Zeno, and the rest, if you've got rheumatism? Now I mean to have classes, to teach people what they should eat and drink—and I'll do it, if you won't assume the guardianship of my nephew's wife."

"But this is the wildest notion I ever heard of!" Ingram protested again. "How can I take charge of her? If Sheila herself had shown any disposition to place herself under your care, it might have been different."

"Oh, it would have been different!" cried the old lady, with a shrill laugh. "It would have been different! And what did you say about her sense of duty to her husband's relatives? Did you say anything about that?"

"Well——" Ingram was about to say, being lost in amazement at the odd glee of this withered old creature.

"Where do you think a young wife should go, if she runs off from her husband's house?" cried Mrs. Lavender, apparently much amused by his perplexity. "Where can she best escape calumny? Poor man! I won't frighten you, or disturb you any longer. Ring the bell, will you? I want Paterson."

Ingram rang.

"Paterson," said Mrs. Lavender, when the tall and grave woman appeared, "ask Mrs. Lavender if she can come here for a few minutes."

Ingram looked at the old woman, to see if she had gone mad; and then, somehow, he instinctively turned to the door. He fancied he knew that quick, light step. And then, before he well knew how, Sheila had come forward to him, with her hands outstretched, and with something like a smile on her pale face. She looked at him for a second; she tried to speak to him, but there was a dangerous quivering of the lips; and then she suddenly burst into tears, and let go his hands and turned away. In that brief moment he had seen what havoc had been wrought within the past two or three days. There were the same proud and

handsome features, but they were pale and wan; and there was a piteous and weary look in the eyes, that told of the trouble and heartrending of sleepless nights.

"Sheila," he said, following her and taking her hand, "does anyone know of your being here?"

"No," she said, still holding her head aside, and downcast; "no one. And I do not wish anyone to know. I am going away."

"Where?"

"Don't you ask too much, Mr. Ingram," said the old lady, from amid her cushions and curtains. "Give her that ammonia—the stopper only. Now, sit down, child; and dry your eyes. You need not be ashamed to show Mr. Ingram that you knew where you ought to come to when you left your husband's house. And if you won't stop here, of course I can't compel you; though Mr. Ingram will tell you you might do worse."

"Sheila, why do you wish to go away? Do you mean to go back to the Lewis?"

"Oh! no, no!" she said, almost shuddering.

"Where do you wish to go?"

"Anywhere—it does not matter. But I cannot remain here. I should meet with—with many people I used to know. Mrs. Lavender, she is kind enough to say she will get me some place, for Mairi and me—that is all as yet that is settled."

"Is Mairi with you?"

"Yes; I will go and bring her to you. It is not anyone in London she will want to see as much as you."

Sheila left the room, and by and by came back, leading the young Highland girl by the hand. Mairi was greatly embarrassed, scarcely knowing whether she should show any gladness at meeting this old

friend amid so much trouble. But when Ingram shook hands with her, and after she had blushed, and looked shy, and said, "And are you ferry well, sir?" she managed somehow to lift her eyes to his face; and then she said, suddenly—

"And it is a good day, this day, for Miss Sheila, that you will come to see her, Mr. Ingram; for she will hef a friend now."

"You silly girl," said Mrs. Lavender, sharply, "why will you say 'Miss Sheila'? Don't you know she is a married woman?"

Mairi glanced in a nervous and timid manner towards the bed. She was evidently afraid of the little shrivelled old woman with the staring black eyes and the harsh voice.

"Mairi hasn't forgotten her old habits, that is all," said Ingram, patting her good-naturedly on the head.

And then he sat down again; and it seemed so strange to him to see these two together again, and to hear the odd infection of Mairi's voice, that he almost forgot that he had made a great discovery in learning of Sheila's whereabouts, and wholly forgot that he had just been offered, and had just refused, a fortune.

CHAPTER VII.

Meeting and Parting.

THE appearance of Sheila in Mrs. Lavender's house certainly surprised Ingram; but the motives which led her to go thither were simple enough. On the morning on which she had left her husband's house, she and Mairi had been driven up to Euston Square Sta-

tion before she seemed capable of coming to any decision. Mairi guessed at what had happened, with a great fear at her heart, and did not dare to speak of it. She sat, mute and frightened, in a corner of the cab, and only glanced from time to time at her companion's pale face and troubled and distant eyes.

They were driven in to the station. Sheila got out, still seeming to know nothing of what was around her. The cabman took down Mairi's trunk, and handed it to a porter.

"Where for, miss?" said the man. And she started.

"Where will you be going, Miss Sheila?" said Mairi, timidly.

"It is no matter just now," said Sheila to the porter, "if you will be so kind as to take charge of the trunk. And how much must I pay the cabman from Notting Hill?"

She gave him the money, and walked into the great stone-paved hall, with its lofty roof and sounding echoes.

"Mairi," she said, "I have gone away from my own home, and I have no home for you or myself either. What are we to do?"

"Are you quite sure, Miss Sheila," said the girl, dismayed beyond expression, "that you will not go back to your own house? It wass a bad day this day that I wass come to London to find you going away from your own house?"

And Mairi began to cry.

"Will we go back to the Lewis, Miss Sheila?" she said. "It is many a one there will be proud and pleased to see you again in sa Lewis, and there will be plenty of homes for you there—oh, yes! ferry many *that* will be glad to see you! And it was a bad day

sa day you left the Lewis whatever; and if you will go back again, Miss Sheila, you will neffer hef to go away again not any more."

Sheila looked at the girl—at the pretty pale face, the troubled light-blue eyes, and the abundant fair-yellow hair. It was Mairi, sure enough, who was talking to her; and yet it was in a strange place. There was no sea dashing outside—no tide running in from the Atlantic. And where was old Scarlett, with her complaints, and her petulance, and her motherly kindness?

"It is a pity you have come to London, Mairi," Sheila said, wistfully; "for I have no house to take you into; and we must go now and find one."

"You will not go back to sa Lewis, Miss Sheila?"

"They would not know me in the Lewis any more, Mairi. I have been too long away, and I am quite changed. It is many a time I will think of going back; but when I left the Lewis, I was married; and now—— How could I go back to the Lewis, Mairi? They would look at me. They would ask questions. My father would come down to the quay, and he would say, 'Sheila have you come back alone?' And all the story of it would go about the island, and everyone would say I had been a bad wife, and my husband had gone away from me."

"There is not anyone," said Mairi, with the tears starting to her eyes again, "not from end of sa island to sa other, would say that of you, Miss Sheila; and there is no one would not come to meet you, and be glad sat you will come again to your own home. And as for going back, I will be ferry glad to go back whatever, for it was you I wass come to see, and not any town; and I do not like this town, what I hef seen of

it, and I will be ferry glad to go away wis you, Miss Sheila."

Sheila did not answer. She felt that it was impossible she could go back to her own people with this disgrace upon her, and did not even argue the question with herself. All her trouble now was to find some harbour of refuge into which she could flee, so that she might have quiet, and solitude, and an opportunity of studying all that had befallen her. The noise around her—the arrival of travellers, the transference of luggage, the screaming of trains—stunned her and confused her; and she could only vaguely think of all the people she knew in London, to see to whom she could go for advice and direction. They were not many. One after the other she went over the acquaintances she had made; and not one of them appeared to her in the light of a friend. One friend she had, who would have rejoiced to have been of the least assistance to her; but her husband had forbidden her to hold communication with him, and she felt a strange sort of pride, even at this moment, in resolving to obey that injunction. In all this great city that lay around her, there was no other to whom she could frankly and readily go. That one friend she had possessed before she came to London; in London, she had not made another.

And yet it was necessary to do something; for who could tell but that her husband might come to this station in search of her? Mairi's anxiety, too, was increasing every moment; insomuch that she was fairly trembling with excitement and fatigue. Sheila resolved that she would go down and throw herself on the tender mercies of that terrible old lady in Kensington Gore. For one thing, she instinctively sought the help

of a woman in her present plight; and perhaps this harshly-spoken old lady would be gentle to her when all her story was told. Another thing that prompted this decision was a sort of secret wish to identify herself even yet with her husband's family; to prove to herself, as it were, that they had not cast her off as being unworthy of him. Nothing was further from her mind at this moment than any desire to pave the way for reconciliation and reunion with her husband. Her whole anxiety was to get away from him; to put an end to a state of things which she had found to be more than she could bear. And yet, if she had had friends in London called respectively Mackenzie and Lavender, and if she had been equally intimate with both, she would at this moment have preferred to go for help to those bearing the name of Lavender.

There was doubtless something strangely inconsistent in this instinct of wifely loyalty and duty in a woman who had just voluntarily left her husband's house. Lavender had desired her not to hold communication with Edward Ingram; even now she would respect his wish. Lavender would prefer that she should, in any great extremity, go to his aunt for assistance and counsel; and to his aunt, despite her own dislike of the woman, she would go. At this moment, when Sheila's proud spirit had risen up in revolt against a system of treatment that had become insufferable to her, when she had been forced to leave her home and incur the contemptuous compassion of friends and acquaintances, if Edward Ingram himself had happened to meet her, and had begun to say hard things of Lavender, she would have sharply recalled him to a sense of the discretion that one must use in speaking to a wife of her husband.

The two homeless girls got into another cab, and were driven down to Kensington Gore. Sheila asked if she could see Mrs. Lavender. She knew that the old lady had had another bad fit; but she was supposed to be recovering rapidly. Mrs. Lavender would see her in her bedroom; and so Sheila went up.

The girl could not speak.

"Yes, I see it—something wrong about that precious husband of yours," said the old lady, watching her keenly. "I expected it. Go on. What is the matter?"

"I have left him," Sheila said, with her face very pale, but no sign of emotion about the firm lips.

"Oh, good gracious, child! Left him? How many people know it?"

"No one, but yourself, and a young Highland girl who has come up to see me."

"You came to me first of all?"

"Yes."

"Have you no other friends to go to?"

"I considered that I ought to come to you."

There was no cunning in the speech; it was the simple truth. Mrs. Lavender looked at her hard for a second or two, and then said, in what she meant to be a kind way—

"Come here, and sit down, child; and tell me all about it. If no one else knows it, there is no harm done. We can easily patch it up before it gets abroad."

"I did not come to you for that, Mrs. Lavender," said Sheila, calmly. "That is impossible. That is all over. I have come to ask you where I may get lodgings for my friend and myself."

"Tell me all about it, first: and then we'll see

whether it can't be mended. Mind, I am ready to be on your side, though I am your husband's aunt. I think you're a good girl—a bit of a temper, you know—but you manage to keep it quiet ordinarily. You tell me all about it; and you'll see if I haven't means to bring him to reason. Oh, yes—oh, yes—I'm an old woman; but I can find some means to bring him to reason." And she laughed an odd, shrill laugh.

A hot flush came over Sheila's face. Had she come to this old woman only to make her husband's degradation more complete? Was he to be intimidated into making friends with her by a threat of the withdrawal of that money that Sheila had begun to detest? And this was what her notions of wifely duty had led to!

"Mrs. Lavender," she said, with the proud lips very proud indeed, "I must say this to you before I tell you anything. It is very good of you to say you will take my side; but I did not come to you to complain. And I would rather not have any sympathy from you if it only means that you will speak ill of my husband. And if you think you can make him do things because you give him money—perhaps that is true at present; but it may not always be true, and you cannot expect me to wish it to continue. I would rather have my present trouble twenty times over than see him being bought over to any woman's wishes."

Mrs. Lavender stared at her.

"Why, you astonishing girl, I believe you are still in love with that man."

Sheila said nothing.

"Is it true?" she said.

"I suppose a woman ought to love her husband," Sheila answered.

"Even if he turns her out of the house?"

"Perhaps it is she who is to blame," Sheila said, humbly. "Perhaps her education was wrong—or she expects too much that is unreasonable—or perhaps she has a bad temper. You think I have a bad temper, Mrs. Lavender; and might it not be that?"

"Well, I think you want your own way; and doubtless you expect it now. I suppose I am to listen to all your story, and I must not say a word about my own nephew. But sit down and tell all about it; and then you can justify him afterwards, if you like."

It was probably, however, the notion that Sheila would try to justify Lavender all through that put the old lady on her guard, and made her, indeed, regard Lavender's conduct in an unfairly bad light. Sheila told the story as simply as she could, putting everything down to her husband's advantage that was possible, and asking for no sympathy whatsoever. She only wanted to remain away from his house; and by what means could she and this young cousin of hers find cheap lodgings where they could live quietly, and without much fear of detection?

Mrs. Lavender was in a rage; and, as she was not allowed to vent it on the proper object, she turned upon Sheila herself.

"The Highlanders are a proud race," she said, sharply. "I should have thought that rooms in this house, even with the society of a cantankerous old woman, would have been tolerated for a time."

"It is very kind of you to make the offer," Sheila said, "but I do not wish to have to meet my husband or any of his friends. There is enough trouble without that. If you could tell me where to get lodgings not *far* from this neighbourhood, I would come to see you

sometimes at such hours as I know he cannot be here."

"But I don't understand what you mean. You won't go back to your husband—although I could manage that for you directly. You won't hear of negotiations, or of any prospect of your going back; and yet you won't go home to your father."

"I cannot do either," Sheila said.

"Do you mean to live in those lodgings always?"

"How can I tell?" said the girl, piteously. "I only wish to be away; and I cannot go back to my papa, with all this story to tell him."

"Well, I didn't want to distress you," said the old woman. "You know your own affairs best. I think you are mad. If you would calmly reason with yourself, and show to yourself that, in a hundred years, or less than that, it won't matter whether you gratified your pride or no, you would see that the wisest thing you can do now is to take an easy and comfortable course. You are in an excited and nervous state at present, for example; and that is destroying so much of the vital portion of your frame. If you go into these lodgings, and live like a rat in a hole, you will have nothing to do but nurse these sorrows of yours, and find them grow bigger and bigger, while you grow more and more wretched. All that is mere pride, and sentiment, and folly. On the other hand, look at this. Your husband is sorry you are away from him—you may take that for granted. You say he was merely thoughtless; now he has got something to make him think, and would without doubt come and beg your pardon, if you gave him a chance. I write to him; he comes down here; you kiss and make good friends

again, and to-morrow morning you are comfortable and happy again."

"To-morrow morning?" said Sheila, sadly. "Do you know how we should be situated to-morrow morning? The story of my going away would become known to his friends; he would go among them as though he had suffered some disgrace, and I the cause of it. And though he is a man, and would soon be careless of that, how could I go with him amongst his friends, and feel that I had shamed him? It would be worse than ever between us; and I have no wish to begin again what ended this morning—none at all, Mrs. Lavender."

"And do you mean to say that you intend to live permanently apart from your husband?"

"I do not know," said Sheila, in a despairing tone. "I cannot tell you. What I feel is that, with all this trouble, it is better that our life as it was in that house should come to an end."

Then she rose. There was a tired look about her face, as if she were too weary to care whether this old woman would help her or no. Mrs. Lavender regarded her for a moment, wondering, perhaps, that a girl so handsome, fine-coloured, and proud-eyed, should be distressing herself with imaginary sentiments, instead of taking life cheerfully, enjoying the hour as it passed, and being quite assured of the interest, and liking, and homage of everyone with whom she came in contact. Sheila turned to the bed once more, about to say that she had troubled Mrs. Lavender too much already, and that she would look after these lodgings. But the old woman apparently anticipated as much, and said, with much deliberation, that if Sheila and her companion would only remain one or two days

in the house, proper rooms should be provided for them somewhere. Young girls could not venture into lodgings without strict inquiries being made. Sheila should have suitable rooms; and Mrs. Lavender would see that she was properly looked after, and that she wanted for nothing. In the meantime she must have some money.

"It is kind of you," said the girl, blushing hotly, "but I do not require it."

"Oh, I suppose we are too proud!" said the old woman. "If we disapprove of our husband taking money, we must not do it either. Why, child, you have learnt nothing in London. You are a savage yet. You must let me give you something for your pocket, or what are you to do? You say you have left everything at home; do you think hair-brushes, for example, grow on trees, that you can go into Kensington Gardens and stock your rooms?"

"I have some money—a few pounds—that my papa gave me," Sheila said.

"And when that is done?"

"He will give me more."

"And yet you don't wish him to know you have left your husband's house! What will he make of these repeated demands for money?"

"My papa will give me anything I want, without asking any questions."

"Then he is a bigger fool than I expected. Oh, don't get into a temper again. Those sudden shocks of colour, child, show me that your heart is out of order. How can you expect to have a regular pulsation if you flare up at anything anyone may say? Now go and fetch me your Highland cousin."

Mairi came into the room in a very timid fashion,

and stared with her big, light-blue eyes into the dusky recess in which the little old woman sat up in bed. Sheila took her forward.

"This is my cousin Mairi, Mrs. Lavender."

"And are you ferry well, ma'am?" said Mairi, holding out her hand very much as a boy pretends to hold out his hand to a tiger in the Zoological Gardens.

"Well, young lady," said Mrs. Lavender, staring at her, and a pretty mess *you* have got us into!"

"Me!" said Mairi, almost with a cry of pain: she had not imagined before that she had anything to do with Sheila's trouble.

"No, no, Mairi," her companion said, taking her hand; "it was not you. Mrs. Lavender, Mairi does not understand our way of joking in London. Perhaps she will learn before she goes back to the Highlands."

"There is one thing," said Mrs. Lavender, observing that Mairi's eyes had filled the moment she was charged with bringing trouble on Sheila, "there is one thing you people from the Highlands seem never disposed to learn, and that is, to have a little control over your passions. If one speaks to you a couple of words, you either begin to cry or go off into a flash of rage. Don't you know how bad that is for the health?"

"And yet," said Sheila, with a smile—and it seemed so strange to Mairi to see her smile—"we will not compare badly in health with the people about us here."

Mrs. Lavender dropped the question, and began to explain to Sheila what she advised her to do. In the meantime both the girls were to remain in her house. She would guarantee their being met by no one. When suitable rooms had been looked out by Paterson, they

were to remove thither. The whole situation of affairs was at once perceived by Mrs. Lavender's attendant, who was given to understand that no one was to know of young Mrs. Lavender's being in the house. Then the old woman, much contented with what she had done, resolved that she would reward herself with a joke; and sent for Edward Ingram.

When Sheila, as already described, came into the room, and found her old friend there, the resolution she had formed went clean out of her mind. She forgot entirely the ban that had been placed on Ingram by her husband. But after her first emotion on seeing him was over, and when he began to discuss what she ought to do, and even to advise her in a diffident sort of way, she remembered all that she had forgotten, and was ashamed to find herself sitting there, and talking to him, as if it were in her father's house at Borva. Indeed, when he proposed to take the management of her affairs into his own hands, and to go and look at certain apartments that Paterson had proposed, she was forced, with great heartburning and pain, to hint to him that she could not avail herself of his kindness.

"But why?" he asked, with a stare of surprise.

"You remember Brighton," she answered, looking down. "You had a bad return for your kindness to me then."

"Oh, I know," he said, carelessly. "And I suppose Mr. Lavender wished you to cut me for my impertinent interference. But things are very much changed now. But for the time he went North, he has been with me nearly every hour since you left."

"Has Frank been to the Lewis?" she said, suddenly, with a look of fear on her face.

"Oh no; he has only been to Glasgow to see if you had gone to catch the *Clansman*, and go North from there."

"Did he take the trouble to do all that?" she asked, slowly and wistfully.

"Trouble!" cried Ingram. "He appears to me neither to eat nor sleep day or night; but to go wandering about in search of you in every place where he fancies you may be. I never saw a man so beside himself with anxiety——"

"I did not wish to make him anxious," said Sheila, in a low voice. "Will you tell him that I am well?"

Mrs. Lavender began to smile. Were there not evident signs of softening? But Ingram, who knew the girl better, was not deceived by these appearances. He could see that Sheila merely wished that her husband should not suffer pain on her account: that was all.

"I was about to ask you," he said, gently, "what I may say to him. He comes to me continually; for he has always fancied that you would communicate with me. What shall I say to him, Sheila?"

"You may tell him that I am well."

Mairi had by this time stepped out of the room. Sheila sat with her eyes fixed on the floor, her fingers working nervously with a paper-knife she held.

"Nothing more than that?" he said.

"Nothing more."

He saw by her face, and he could tell by the sound of her voice, that her decision was resolute.

"Don't be a fool, child," said Mrs. Lavender, emphatically. "Here is your husband's friend, who can make everything straight and comfortable for you in an hour or two, and you quietly put aside the chance of reconciliation, and bring on yourself any amount of misery. I don't speak for Frank. Men can take

care of themselves; they have clubs, and friends, and amusements for the whole day long. But you—what a pleasant life you would have, shut up in a couple of rooms, scarcely daring to show yourself at a window! Your fine sentiments are all very well; but they won't stand in the place of a husband to you; and you will soon find out the difference between living by yourself like that, and having some one in the house to look after you. Am I right, Mr. Ingram, or am I wrong?"

Ingram paused for a moment, and said—

"I have not the same courage that you have, Mrs. Lavender. I dare not advise Sheila one way or the other just at present. But if she feels in her own heart that she would rather return now to her husband, I can safely say that she would find him deeply grateful to her, and that he would try to do everything that she desired. That I know. He wants to see you, Sheila, if only for five minutes—to beg your forgiveness——"

"I cannot see him," she said, with the same sad and settled air.

"I am not to tell him where you are?"

"Oh no!" she cried, with a sudden and startled emphasis. "You must not do that, Mr. Ingram. Promise me you will not do that?"

"I do promise you; but you put a painful duty on me, Sheila; for you know how he will believe that a short interview with you would put everything right, and he will look on me as preventing that."

"Do you think a short interview at present would put everything right?" she said, suddenly looking up, and regarding him with her clear and steadfast eyes.

He dared not answer. He felt in his inmost heart that it would not.

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Lavender, "young people have much satisfaction in being proud; when they come to my age, they may find they would have been happier if they had been less disdainful."

"It is not disdain, Mrs. Lavender," said Sheila, gently.

"Whatever it is," said the old woman, "I must remind you two people that I am an invalid. Go away, and have luncheon. Paterson will look after you. Mr. Ingram, give me that book, that I may read myself into a nap; and don't forget what I expect of you."

Ingram suddenly remembered. He and Sheila and Mairi sat down to luncheon in the dining-room; and, while he strove to get them to talk about Borva, he was thinking all the time of the extraordinary position he was expected to assume towards Sheila. Not only was he to be the repository of the secret of her place of residence, and the message-carrier between herself and her husband; but he was also to take Mrs. Lavender's fortune, in the event of her dying, and hold it in trust for the young wife. Surely this old woman, with her suspicious ways and her worldly wisdom, would not be so foolish as to hand him over all her property, free of conditions, on the simple understanding that when he chose he could give what he chose to Sheila! And yet that was what she had vowed she would do, to Ingram's profound dismay.

He laboured hard to lighten the spirits of those two girls. He talked of John the Piper, and said he would invite him up to London; and described his probable appearance in the Park. He told them stories of his adventures while he was camping out with some young artists in the western Highlands; and told them anecdotes, old, recent, and of his own invention, about the people he had met. Had they heard of the steward

on board one of the Clyde steamers, who had a percentage on the drink consumed in the cabin, and who would call out to the captain, "Why wass you going so fast? Dinna put her into the quay so fast! There is a gran' company down below, and they are drinking fine!" Had he ever told them of the porter at Arran who had demanded sixpence for carrying up some luggage, but who, after being sent to get a sovereign changed, came back with only eighteen shillings, saying, "Oh, yes, it iss sexpence! Oh, aye, it iss sexpence! But it iss two shullens *ta you!*" Or of the other, who, after being paid, hung about the cottage-door for nearly an hour, until Ingram, coming out, asked him why he had waited; whereupon he said, with an air of perfect indifference, "Oo aye, there wass something said about a dram; but hoot toots! it is of no consequence whatever!" And was it true that the Sheriff of Stornoway was so kind-hearted a man that he remitted the punishment of certain culprits, ordained by the statute to be whipped with birch-rods, on the ground that the island of Lewis produced no birch, and that he was not bound to import it? And had Mairi heard any more of the Black Horse of Loch Suainabhal? And where had she pulled those splendid bunches of bell-heather?

He suddenly stopped, and Sheila looked up with inquiring eyes. How did he know that Mairi had brought those things with her? Sheila saw that he must have gone up with her husband, and must have seen the room which she had decorated in imitation of the small parlour at Borvabost. She would rather not think of that room now.

"When are you going to the Lewis?" she asked of him, with her eyes cast down.

"Well, I think I have changed my mind about that, Sheila. I don't think I shall go to the Lewis this autumn."

Her face became more and more embarrassed; how was she to thank him for his continued thoughtfulness and self-sacrifice?

"There is no necessity," he said, lightly. "The man I am going with has no particular purpose in view. We shall merely go cruising about those wonderful lochs and islands; and I am sure to run against some of those young fellows I know, who are prowling about the fishing-villages with portable easels. They are good boys, those boys. They are very hospitable, if they have only a single bed-room in a small cottage as their studio and reception-room combined. I should not wonder, Sheila, if I went ashore somewhere, and put up my lot with those young fellows, and listened to their wicked stories, and live on whisky and herrings for a month. Would you like to see me return to Whitehall in kilts? And I should go into the office, and salute everybody with 'And are you ferry well?' just as Mairi does. But don't be down-hearted, Mairi. You speak English a good deal better than many English folks I know; and by the time you go back to the Lewis, we shall have you fit to become a school-mistress, not only in Borva, but in Stornoway itself."

"I wass told it is ferry good English they hef in Stornoway," said Mairi, not very sure whether Mr. Ingram was joking or not.

"My dear child!" he cried, "I tell you it is the best English in the world. If the Queen only knew, she would send her grandchildren to be educated there. But I must go now. Good-bye, Mairi. I

mean to come and take you to a theatre some night soon."

Sheila accompanied him out into the hall.

"When shall you see him?" she said, with her eyes cast down.

"This evening," he answered.

"I should like you to tell him that I am well, and that he need not be anxious about me."

"And that is all?"

"Yes, that is all."

"Very well, Sheila. I wish you had given me a pleasanter message to carry; but when you think of doing that, I shall be glad to take it."

Ingram left, and hastened in to his office. Sheila's affairs were considerably interfering with his attendance there, there could be no question of that; but he had the reputation of being able to get through his work thoroughly, whatever might be the hours he devoted to it; so that he did not greatly fear being rebuked for his present irregularities. Perhaps, if a grave official warning had been probable, even that would not have interfered much with his determination to do what could be done for Sheila.

But this business of carrying a message to Lavender was the most serious he had as yet undertaken. He had to make sundry and solemn resolves to put a bold face on the matter at the outset, and declare that wild horses would not tear from him any further information. He feared the piteous appeals that might be made to him; the representations that, merely for the sake of an imprudent promise, he was delaying a reconciliation between these two until that might be impossible; the reasons that would be urged on him for considering Sheila's welfare as paramount

to his own scruples. He went through the interview, as he foresaw it, a dozen times over; and constructed replies to each argument and entreaty. Of course it would be simple enough to meet all Lavender's demands with a simple "No;" but there are circumstances in which the heroic method of solving difficulties becomes a trifle inhuman.

He had promised to dine with Lavender that evening at his club. When he went along to St. James's Street at the appointed hour, his host had not arrived. He walked about for ten minutes, and then Lavender appeared, haggard and worn-out with fatigue.

"I have heard nothing—I can hear nothing—I have been everywhere," he said, leading the way at once into the dining-room. "I am sorry I have kept you waiting, Ingram."

They sat down at a small side-table; there were few men in the club at this late season; so that they could talk freely enough when the waiter had come and gone.

"Well, I have some news for you, Lavender," Ingram said.

"Do you know where she is?" said the other, eagerly.

"Yes."

"Where?" he almost called aloud, in his anxiety.

"Well," Ingram said, slowly, "she is in London, and she is very well; and you need have no anxiety about her."

"But where is she?" demanded Lavender, taking no heed of the waiter who was standing by and uncorking a bottle.

"I promised her not to tell you."

"You have spoken with her, then?"

"Yes."

"What did she say? Where has she been? Good heavens, Ingram! you don't mean to say you are going to keep it a secret?"

"Oh no," said the other; "I will tell you everything she said to me, if you like. Only I will not tell you where she is——"

"I will not ask you," said Lavender, at once, "if she does not wish me to know. But you can tell me about herself. What did she say? What was she looking like? Is Mairi with her?"

"Yes, Mairi is with her. And of course she is looking a little troubled, and pale, and so forth; but she is very well, I should think, and quite comfortably situated. She said I was to tell you that she was well, and that you need not be anxious."

"She sent a message to me?"

"That is it."

"By Jove, Ingram! how can I ever thank you enough? I feel as glad just now as if she had really come home again. And how did you manage it?"

Lavender, in his excitement and gratitude, kept filling up his friend's glass the moment the least quantity had been taken out of it; the wonder was he did not fill all the glasses on that side of the table, and beseech Ingram to have two or three dinners all at once.

"Oh, you needn't give me any credit about it," Ingram said. "I stumbled against her by accident—at least, I did not find her out myself."

"Did she send for you?"

"No. But look here, Lavender, this sort of cross-examination will lead to but one thing; and you say yourself you won't try to find out where she is."

"Not from you, anyway. But how can I help

wanting to know where she is? And my aunt was saying just now that very likely she had gone right away to the other end of London—to Peckham, or some such place."

"You have seen Mrs. Lavender, then?"

"I have just come from there. The old heathen thinks the whole affair rather a good joke; but perhaps that was only her way of showing her temper, for she was in a bit of a rage, to be sure. And so Sheila sent me that message?"

"Yes."

"Does she want money? Would you take her some money from me?" he said eagerly. Any bond of union between him and Sheila would be of some value.

"I don't think she needs money; and in any case, I know she wouldn't take it from you."

"Well, now, Ingram, you have seen her, and talked with her. What do you think she intends to do? What do you think she would have me do?"

"These are very dangerous questions for me to answer," Ingram said. "I don't see how you can expect me to assume the responsibility."

"I don't ask you to do that at all. But I never found your advice to fail. And if you give me any hint as to what I should do, I will do it on my own responsibility."

"Then I won't. But this I will do. I will tell you as nearly as ever I can what she said; and you can judge for yourself."

Very cautiously indeed did Ingram set out on this perilous undertaking. It was no easy matter so to shut out all references to Sheila's surroundings, that no hint should be given to this anxious listener as to *her* whereabouts. But Ingram got through it success-

fully; and when he had finished, Lavender sat some time in silence, merely toying with his knife, for, indeed, he had eaten nothing.

"If it is her wish," he said, slowly, "that I should not go to see her, I will not try to do so. But I should like to know where she is. You say she is comfortable, and she has Mairi for a companion—and that is something. In the meantime, I suppose I must wait."

"I don't see myself how waiting is likely to do much good," said Ingram. "That won't alter your relations much."

"It may alter her determination. A woman is sure to soften into charity and forgiveness. She can't help it."

"If you were to ask Sheila now, she would say she had forgiven you already. But that is a different matter from getting her to resume her former method of life with you. To tell you the truth, I should strongly advise her, if I were to give advice at all, not to attempt anything of the sort. One failure is bad enough, and has wrought sufficient trouble."

"Then what am I to do, Ingram?"

"You must judge for yourself what is the most likely way of winning back Sheila's confidence in you, and the most likely conditions under which she might be induced to join you again. You need not expect to get her back into that Square, I should fancy; *that* experiment has rather broken down."

"Well," said Lavender, "I sha'n't bore you any more just now about my affairs. Look after your dinner, old fellow; your starving yourself won't help me much."

"I don't mean to starve myself at all," said In-

gram, steadily making his way through the abundant dishes his friend had ordered. "But I had a very good luncheon this morning with——"

"With Sheila," Lavender said, quickly.

"Yes. Does it surprise you to find that she is in a place where she can get food? I wish the poor child had made better use of her opportunities."

"Ingram," he said, after a minute, "could you take some money from me, without her knowing of it, and try to get her some of the little things she likes—some delicacies, you know—they might be smuggled in, as it were, without her knowing who had paid for them? There was ice-pudding, you know, with strawberries in it, that she was fond of——"

"My dear fellow, a woman in her position thinks of something else than ice-pudding in strawberries——"

"But why shouldn't she have it all the same? I would give twenty pounds to get some little gratification of that sort conveyed to her; and if you could try, Ingram——"

"My dear fellow, she has got everything she can want: there was no ice-pudding at luncheon, but doubtless there will be at dinner."

So Sheila was staying in a house in which ices could be prepared? Lavender's suggestion had had no cunning intention in it; but here was an obvious piece of information. She was in no humble lodging-house, then. She was either staying with some friends —and she had no friends but Lavender's friends—or she was staying at an hotel. He remembered that she had once dined at the Langham, Mrs. Kavanagh having persuaded her to go to meet some American visitors. Might she have gone thither?

Lavender was somewhat silent during the rest of

that meal; for he was thinking of other things besides the mere question as to where Sheila might be staying. He was trying to imagine what she may have felt before she was driven to this step. He was trying to recall all manner of incidents of their daily life that he now saw might have appeared to her in a very different light from that in which he saw them. He was wondering, too, how all this could be altered; and a new life began for them both, if that were still possible.

They had gone up-stairs into the smoking-room, when a card was brought to Lavender.

"Young Mosenberg is below," he said to Ingram. "He will be a livelier companion for you than I could be. Waiter, ask this gentleman to come up."

The handsome Jew-boy came eagerly into the room, with much excitement visible on his face.

"Oh, do you know," he said to Lavender, "I have found out where Mrs. Lavender is, yes: she is at your aunt's house. I saw her this afternoon—for one moment——"

He stopped; for he saw by the vexation on Ingram's face that he had done something wrong.

"Is it a mistake?" he said. "Is it a secret?"

"It is not likely to be a secret if you have got hold of it," said Ingram, sharply.

"I am very sorry," said the boy. "I thought you were all anxious to know——"

"It does not matter in the least," said Lavender, quietly, to both of them. "I shall not seek to disturb her. I am about to leave London."

"Where are you going," said the boy.

"I don't know yet."

That, at least, had been part of the result of his meditations; and Ingram, looking at him, wondered

whether he meant to go away without trying to say one word to Sheila.

"Look here, Lavender," he said, "you must not fancy we were trying to play any useless and impertinent trick. To-morrow or next day Sheila will leave your aunt's house; and then I should have told you she had been there, and how the old lady received her. It was Sheila's own wish that the lodgings she is going to should not be known. She fancies that would save both of you a great deal of unnecessary and fruitless pain, do you see. That really is her only object in wishing to have any concealment about the matter."

"But there is no need for any such concealment," he said. "You may tell Sheila that if she likes to stay on with my aunt, so much the better; and I take it very kind of her that she went there, instead of going home, or to a strange house."

"Am I to tell her that you mean to leave London?"

"Yes."

They went into the billiard-room. Mosenberg was not permitted to play, as he had not dined in the club; but Ingram and Lavender proceeded to have a game, the former being content to accept something like thirty in a hundred. It was speedily very clear that Lavender's heart was not in the contest. He kept forgetting which ball he had been playing; missing easy shots; playing a perversely wrong game; and so forth. And yet his spirits were not much downcast.

"Is Peter Hewetson still at Tarbert, do you know?" he asked of Ingram.

"I believe so. I heard of him lately. He and one of two more are there."

"I suppose you'll look in on them if you go North?"

"Certain. The place is badly perfumed, but picturesque; and there is generally plenty of whisky about."

"When do you go North?"

"I don't know. In a week or two."

That was all that Lavender hinted of his plans. He went home early that night, and spent an hour or two in packing up some things, and in writing a long letter to his aunt, which was destined considerably to astonish that lady. Then he lay down, and had a few hours' rest.

In the early morning he went out and walked across Kensington Gardens down to the Gore. He wished to have one look at the house in which Sheila was; or perhaps he might, from a distance, see her come out on a simple errand? He knew, for example, that she had a superstitious liking for posting her letters herself; in wet weather or dry, she invariably carried her own correspondence to the nearest pillar-post. Perhaps he might have one glimpse of her face, to see how she was looking, before he left London.

There were few people about; one or two well-known lawyers and merchants were riding by to have their morning canter in the Park; the shops were being opened. Over there was the house—with its dark front of bricks, its hard ivy, and its small windows with formal red curtains—in which Sheila was immured. That was certainly not the palace that a beautiful Sea-Princess should have inhabited. Where were the pine woods around it, and the lofty hills, and the wild beating of the waves on the sands below? And now it seemed strange and sad that just as he was about to go away to the North, and breathe the salt air again, and find the strong west winds

blowing across the mountain peaks and through the furze, Sheila, a daughter of the sea and the rocks, should be hiding herself in obscure lodgings in the heart of a great city. Perhaps—he could not but think at this time—if he had only the chance of speaking to her for a couple of moments he could persuade her to forgive him everything that had happened, and go away with him—away from London and all the associations that had vexed her and almost broke her heart—to the free, and open, and joyous life on the far sea-coasts of the Hebrides.

Something caused him to turn his head for a second, and he knew that Sheila was coming along the pavement, not from, but towards the house. It was too late to think of getting out of her way; and yet he dared not go up to her and speak to her, as he had wished to do. She, too, had seen him. There was a quick, frightened look in her eyes; and then she came along, with her face pale, and her head downcast. He did not seek to interrupt her. His eyes, too, were lowered as she passed him without taking any notice of his presence, although the sad face and the troubled lips told of the pain at her heart. He had hoped, perchance, for one word, for even a sign of recognition; but she went by him calmly, gravely, and silently. She went into the house; and he turned away, with a weight at his heart, as though the gates of heaven had been closed against him.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Like Hadrianus and Augustus."

THE island of Borva lay warm, and green, and bright under a blue sky; there were no white curls of

foam on Loch Roag, but only the long Atlantic swell coming in to fall on the white beach; away over there in the south the fine greys and purples of the giant Suainabhal shone in the sunlight amid the clear air; and the beautiful seapyots flew about the rocks, their screaming being the only sound audible in the stillness. The King of Borva was down by the shore, seated on a stool, and engaged in the idyllic operation of painting a boat which had been hauled up on the sand. It was the *Maighdean-mhara*. He would let no one else on the island touch Sheila's boat. Duncan, it is true, was permitted to keep her masts and sails and seats sound and white; but as for the decorative painting of the small craft—including a little bit of amateur gilding—that was the exclusive right of Mr. Mackenzie himself. For of course, the old man said to himself, Sheila was coming back to Borva one of these days; and she would be proud to find her own boat bright and sound. If she and her husband should resolve to spend half the year in Stornoway, would not the small craft be of use to her there, and sure he was that a prettier little vessel never entered Stornoway bay. Mr. Mackenzie was at this moment engaged in putting a thin line of green round the white bulwarks that might have been distinguished across Loch Roag, so keen and pure was the colour.

A much heavier boat, broad-beamed, red-hulled, and brown-sailed, was slowly coming round the point at this moment. Mr. Mackenzie raised his eyes from his work, and knew that Duncan was coming back from Callernish. Some few minutes thereafter, the boat was run in to her moorings, and Duncan came along the beach with a parcel in his hand.

"Here wass your letters, sir," he said. "And there

iss one of them will be from Miss Sheila, if I wass make no mistake."

He remained there. Duncan generally knew pretty well when a letter from Sheila was among the documents he had to deliver; and, on such an occasion, he invariably lingered about to hear the news, which was immediately spread abroad throughout the island. The old King of Borva was not a garrulous man; but he was glad that the people about him should know that his Sheila had become a fine lady in the south, and saw fine things, and went among fine people. Perhaps this notion of his was a sort of apology to them — perhaps it was an apology to himself—for his having let her go away from the island; but at all events the simple folks about Borva knew that Miss Sheila, as they still invariably called her, lived in the same town as the Queen herself, and saw many lords and ladies, and was present at great festivities, as became Mr. Mackenzie's only daughter. And naturally these rumours and stories were exaggerated by the kindly interest and affection of the people into something far beyond what Sheila's father intended; insomuch that many an old crone would proudly and sagaciously wag her head, and say that when Miss Sheila came back to Borva strange things might be seen, and it would be a proud day for Mr. Mackenzie if he was to go down to the shore to meet Queen Victoria herself, and the Princes and Princesses, and many fine people, all come to stay at his house and have great rejoicings in Borva.

Thus it was that Duncan invariably lingered about when he brought a letter from Sheila; and if her father happened to forget, or be pre-occupied, Duncan would humbly but firmly remind him. On this

occasion Mr. Mackenzie put down his paint-brush and took the bundle of letters and newspapers Duncan had brought him. He selected that from Sheila, and threw the others on the beach beside him.

There was really no news in the letter. Sheila merely said that she could not as yet answer her father's question as to the time she might probably visit Lewis. She hoped he was well; and that, if she could not get up to Borva that year, he would come south to London for a time, when the hard weather set in in the north. And so forth. But there was something in the tone of the letter that struck the old man as being unusual and strange. It was very formal in its phraseology. He read it twice over, very carefully, and forgot altogether that Duncan was waiting. Indeed, he was going to turn away, forgetting his work and the other letters that still lay on the beach, when he observed that there was a postscript on the other side of the last page. It merely said—"*Will you please address your letters now to No.—Pembroke Road, South Kensington, where I may be for some time?*"

That was an imprudent postscript. If she had shown the letter to anyone, she would have been warned of the blunder she was committing. But the child had not much cunning; and wrote and posted the letter in the belief that her father would simply do as she asked him, and suspect nothing, and ask no questions.

When old Mackenzie read that postscript, he could only stare at the paper before him.

"Will there be anything wrong, sir?" said the tall keeper, whose keen grey eyes had been fixed on his master's face.

The sound of Duncan's voice startled and recalled Mr. Mackenzie, who immediately turned, and said, lightly—

"Wrong? What wass you thinking would be wrong? Oh, there is nothing wrong whatever. But Mairi, she will be greatly surprised, and she is going to write no letters until she comes back to tell you what she has seen; that is the message there will be for Scarlett. Sheila—she is very well."

Duncan picked up the other letters and newspapers.

"You may tek them to the house, Duncan," said Mr. Mackenzie, and then he added, carelessly, "Did you hear when the steamer was thinking of leaving Stornoway this night?"

"They were saying it would be seven o'clock or six, as there was a great deal of cargo to go on her."

"Six o'clock? I'm thinking, Duncan, I would like to go with her as far as Oban or Glasgow. Oh yes, I will go with her as far as Glasgow. Be sharp, Duncan, and bring in the boat."

The keeper stared, fearing his master had gone mad.

"You wass going with her this ferry night?"

"Yes. Be sharp, Duncan!" said Mackenzie, doing his best to conceal his impatience and determination under a careless air.

"Bit, sir, you canna do it," said Duncan, peevishly. "You hef no things looked out to go. And by the time we would get to Callernish, it wass a ferry hard drive there will be to get to Stornoway by six o'clock; and there is the mare, sir, she will hef lost a shoe——"

Mr. Mackenzie's diplomacy gave way. He turned upon the keeper with a sudden fierceness, and with a stamp of his foot.

"————you, Duncan MacDonald, is it you or me that is the master? I will go to Stornoway this *ferry* moment if I hef to buy twenty horses!" And

there was a light under the shaggy eyebrows that warned Duncan to have done with his remonstrances.

"Oh, ferry well, sir—ferry well, sir," he said, going off to the boat, and grumbling as he went. "If Miss Sheila wass here, it would be no going away to Glesca without any things wis you, as if you wass a poor traffelin tailor that hass nothing in the world but a needle and a thimble mirover. And what will the people in Styornoway hef to say, and sa captain of sa steamboat; and Scarlett—I will hef no peace from Scarlett if you wass going away like this. And as for sa sweerin, it is no use sa sweerin, for I will get sa boat ready—oh yes, I will get the boat ready—but I do not understand why I will get sa boat ready."

By this time, indeed, he had got along to the larger boat, and his grumblings were inaudible to the object of them. Mr. Mackenzie went to the small landing-place, and waited. When he got into the boat, and sat down in the stern, taking the tiller in his right hand, he still held Sheila's letter in the other hand, although he did not need to re-read it.

They sailed out into the blue waters of the loch, and rounded the point of the island, in absolute silence, Duncan meanwhile being both sulky and curious. He could not make out why his master should so suddenly leave the island, without informing anyone, without even taking with him that tall and roughly-furred black hat which he ordinarily wore on important occasions. Yet there was a letter in his hand; and it was a letter from Miss Sheila. Was the news about Mairi the only news in it?

Duncan kept looking ahead to see that the boat was steering her right course for the Narrows, and was anxious, now that he had started, to make the

voyage in the least possible time; but all the same his eyes would come back to Mr. Mackenzie, who sat very much absorbed, steering almost mechanically, seldom looking ahead, but instinctively guessing his course by the outlines of the shore close by.

"Wass there any bad news, sir, from Miss Sheila?" he was compelled to say at last.

"Miss Sheila!" said Mr. Mackenzie, impatiently. "Is it an infant you are, that you will call a married woman by such a name?"

Duncan had never been checked before for a habit which was common to the whole island of Borva.

"There iss no bad news," continued Mackenzie, impatiently. "Is it a story you would like to tek back to the people of Borvabost?"

"It was no thought of such a thing wass come into my head, sir," said Duncan. "There is no one in sa island would like to carry bad news about Miss Sheila; and there iss no one in sa island would like to hear it—not anyone whatever; and I can answer for that."

"Then hold your tongue about it—there is no bad news from Sheila," said Mackenzie; and Duncan relapsed into silence, not very well content.

By dint of very hard driving indeed Mr. Mackenzie just caught the boat as she was leaving Stornoway harbour; the hurry he was in fortunately saving him from the curiosity and inquiries of the people he knew on the pier. As for the frank and good-natured captain, he did not show that excessive interest in Mr. Mackenzie's affairs that Duncan had feared; but when the steamer was well away from the coast, and bearing down on her route to Skye, he came and had a chat with the King of Borva about the condition of affairs on the west of the island, and he was good

enough to ask, too, about the young lady who had married the English gentleman. Mr. Mackenzie said briefly that she was very well; and returned to the subject of the fishing.

It was on a wet and dreary morning that Mr. Mackenzie arrived in London; and as he was slowly driven through the long and dismal thoroughfares, with their grey and melancholy houses, their passers-by under umbrellas, and their smoke, and drizzle, and dirt, he could not help saying to himself, "My poor Sheila!" It was not a pleasant place surely to live in always, although it might be all very well for a visit. Indeed, this cheerless day added to the gloomy forebodings in his mind; and it needed all his resolve, and his pride in his own diplomacy, to carry out his plan of approaching Sheila.

When he got to Pembroke Road, he stopped the cab at the corner, and paid the man. Then he walked along the thoroughfare, having a look at the houses. At length he came to the number mentioned in Sheila's letter, and he found that there was a brass plate on the door bearing an unfamiliar name. His suspicions were confirmed. He went up the steps and knocked; a small girl answered the summons.

"Is Mrs. Lavender living here?" he said.

She looked for a moment with some surprise at the short, thick-set man, with his sailor costume, his peaked cap, and his great grey beard and shaggy eyebrows; and then she said that she would ask, and what was his name? But Mr. Mackenzie was too sharp not to know what that meant.

"I am her father. It will do ferry well if you will show me the room."

And he stepped inside. The small girl obediently

shut the door, and then led the way upstairs. The next minute Mr. Mackenzie had entered the room, and there, before him, was Sheila, bending over Mairi, and teaching her how to do some fancy-work.

The girl looked up, on hearing some one enter, and then, when she suddenly saw her father there, she uttered a slight cry of alarm, and shrunk back. If he had been less intent on his own plans, he would have been amazed and pained by this action on the part of his daughter, who used to run to him, on great occasions and small, whenever she saw him; but the girl had for the last few days been so habitually schooling herself into the notion that she was keeping a secret from him—she had become so deeply conscious of the concealment intended in that brief letter—that she instinctively shrank from him when he suddenly appeared. It was but for a moment. Mr. Mackenzie came forward, with a fine assumption of carelessness, and shook hands with Sheila and with Mairi, and said—

"How do you do, Mairi? And are you ferry well, Sheila? And you will not expect me this morning; but when a man will not pay you what he wass owing, it was no good letting it go on in that way, and I hef come to London——"

He shook the rain-drops from his cap, and was a little embarrassed.

"Yes, I hef come to London to have an account settled up; for it wass no good letting the man go on for effer and effer. Ay, and how are you, Sheila?"

He glanced about the room—he would not look at her. She stood there, unable to speak, and with her face grown wild and pale.

"Ay, it wass raining hard all the last night, and there was a good deal of water came into the carriage;

and it is a ferry hard bed you will make of a third-class carriage. Ay, it wass so. And this is a new house you will hef, Sheila——"

She had been coming nearer to him, with her face down, and the speechless lips trembling. And then suddenly, with a strange sob, she threw herself into his arms, and hid her head, and burst into a wild fit of crying.

"Sheila," he said, "what ails you? What iss all the matter?"

Mairi had covertly got out of the room.

"Oh, papa, I have left him," the girl cried.

"Ay," said her father, quite cheerfully, "oh ay, I thought there was some little thing wrong when your letter wass come to us the other day. But it is no use making a great deal of trouble about it, Sheila; for it is easy to have all those things put right again —oh yes, ferry easy. And you hef left your own home, Sheila? And where is Mr. Lavender?"

"Oh, papa," she cried, "you must not try to see him. You must promise not to go to see him. I should have told you everything when I wrote, but I thought you would come up, and blame it all on him, and I think it is I who am to blame——"

"But I do not want to blame anyone," said her father. "You must not make so much of these things, Sheila. It is a pity—yes, it is a ferry great pity—your husband and you will hef a quarrel; but it iss no uncommon thing for these troubles to happen; and I am coming to you this morning, not to make any more trouble, but to see if it cannot be put right again. And I do not want to know any more than that; and I will not blame anyone; but if I wass to see Mr. Lavender——"

A bitter anger had filled his heart from the moment

he had learned how matters stood; and yet he was talking in such a bland, matter-of-fact, almost cheerful fashion, that his own daughter was imposed upon, and began to grow comforted. The mere fact that her father now knew of all her troubles, and was not disposed to take a very gloomy view of them, was of itself a great relief to her. And she was greatly pleased, too, to hear her father talk in the same light and even friendly fashion of her husband. She had dreaded the possible results of her writing home and relating what had occurred. She knew the powerful passion of which this lonely old man was capable; and if he had come suddenly down south, with a wild desire to revenge the wrongs of his daughter, what might not have happened!

Sheila sat down, and with averted eyes told her father the whole story, ingenuously making all possible excuses for her husband, and intimating strongly that the more she looked over the history of the past time, the more she was convinced that she was herself to blame. It was but natural that Mr. Lavender should like to live in the manner to which he had been accustomed. She had tried to live that way, too; and the failure to do so was surely her fault. He had been very kind to her. He was always buying her new dresses, jewellery, and what not; and was always pleased to take her to be amused anywhere. All this she said, and a great deal more; and although Mr. Mackenzie did not believe the half of it, he did not say so.

"Ay, ay, Sheila," he said, cheerfully, "but if everything was right like that, what for will you be here?"

"But everything was not right, papa," the girl said, still with her eyes cast down. "I could not live any

longer like that; and I had to come away. That is my fault; and I could not help it. And there was a—a misunderstanding between us about Mairi's visit—for I had said nothing about it—and he was surprised—and he had some friends coming to see us that day——"

"Oh, well, there iss no great harm done—none at all," said her father lightly, and perhaps beginning to think that after all something was to be said on Lavender's side of the question. "And you will not suppose, Sheila, that I am coming to make any trouble by quarrelling with anyone. There are some men—oh yes, there are ferry many—that would hef no judgment at such a time, and they would think only about their daughter, and hef no regard for anyone else, and they would only make effery one angrier than before. But you will tell me, Sheila, where Mr. Lavender is——"

"I do not know," she said. "And I am anxious, papa, you should not go to see him. I have asked you to promise that to please me."

He hesitated. There were not many things he could refuse his daughter; but he was not sure he ought to yield to her in this. For were not these two a couple of foolish young things, who wanted an experienced, and cool, and shrewd person to come with a little dexterous management and arrange their affairs for them?

"I do not think I have half explained the difference between us," said Sheila, in the same low voice. "It is no passing quarrel to be mended up and forgotten—it is nothing like that. You must leave it alone, papa."

"That is foolishness, Sheila," said the old man, with a little impatience. "You are making big things

out of ferry little; and you will only bring trouble to yourself. How do you know but that he wishes to hef all this misunderstanding removed, and hef you go back to him?"

"I know that he wishes that," she said, calmly.

"And you speak as if you wass in great trouble here, and yet you will not go back?" he said, in great surprise.

"Yes, that is so," she said. "There is no use in my going back to the same sort of life: it was not happiness for either of us—and to me it was misery. If I am to blame for it, that is only a misfortune."

"But if you will not go back to him, Sheila," her father said, "at least you will go back with me to Borva."

"I cannot do that either," said the girl, with the same quiet yet decisive manner.

Mr. Mackenzie rose, with an impatient gesture, and walked to the window. He did not know what to say. He was very well aware that when Sheila had resolved upon anything, she had thought it well over beforehand, and was not likely to change her mind. And yet the notion of his daughter living in lodgings in a strange town—her only companion a young girl who had never been in the place before—was vexatiously absurd.

"Sheila," he said, "you will come to a better understanding about that. I suppose you wass afraid the people would wonder at your coming back alone. But they will know nothing about it. Mairi she is a ferry good lass; she will do anything you will ask of her; you hef no need to think she will carry stories. And everyone wass thinking you will be coming to the Lewis this year, and it is ferry glad they will be to see

you; and if the house at Borvabost has not enough amusement for you, after you hef been in a big town like this, you will live in Stornoway with some of our friends there, and you will come over to Borva when you please."

"If I went up to the Lewis," said Sheila, "do you think I could live anywhere but in Borva? It is not any amusements I will be thinking about. But I cannot go back to the Lewis alone."

Her father saw how the pride of the girl had driven her to this decision; and saw, too, how useless it was for him to reason with her just at the present moment. Still there was plenty of occasion here for the use of a little diplomacy, merely to smooth the way for the reconciliation of husband and wife; and Mr. Mackenzie concluded in his own mind that it was far from injudicious to allow Sheila to convince herself that she bore part of the blame of this separation. For example, he now proposed that the discussion of the whole question should be postponed for the present; and that Sheila should take him about London and show him all that she had learned; and he suggested that they should then and there get a hansom cab and drive to some exhibition or other.

"A hansom, papa?" said Sheila. "Mairi must go with us, you know."

This was precisely what he had angled for; and he said, with a show of impatience—

"Mairi; how can we take about Mairi to every place? Mairi is a ferry good lass—oh, yes—but she is a servant-lass."

The words nearly stuck in his throat; and, indeed, had any other addressed such a phrase to one of his kith and kin there would have been an explosion

of rage; but now he was determined to show to Sheila that her husband had some cause for objecting to this girl sitting down with his friends.

But neither husband nor father could make Sheila forswear allegiance to what her own heart told her was just, and honourable, and generous; and indeed her father at this moment was not displeased to see her turn round on himself, with just a touch of indignation in her voice.

"Mairi is my guest, papa," she said. "It is not like you to think of leaving her at home."

"Oh, it wass of no consequence," said old Mackenzie, carelessly—indeed he was not sorry to have met with this rebuff. "Mairi is a ferry good girl—oh, yes—but there are many who would not forget she is a servant-lass, and would not like to be always taking her with them. And you hef lived a long time in London——"

"I have not lived long enough in London to make me forget my friends, or insult them," Sheila said, with proud lips, and yet turning to the window to hide her face.

"My lass, I did not mean any harm whatever," her father said, gently; "I was saying nothing against Mairi. Go away and bring her into the room, Sheila; and we will see what we can do now, and if there is a theatre we can go to this evening. And I must go out, too, to buy some things; for you are a ferry fine lady now, Sheila, and I was coming away in such a hurry——"

"Where is your luggage, papa?" she said, suddenly.

"Oh, luggage?" said Mackenzie, looking round in great embarrassment. "It wass luggage you said, Sheila? Ay, well, it wass a hurry I wass in when I came away—for this man he will hef to pay me at *once* whatever—and there was no time for any luggage

—oh no, there was no time, because Duncan he wass late with the boat, and the mare she had a shoe to put on—and—and—oh no, there wass no time for any luggage."

"But what was Scarlett about, to let you come away like that?" Sheila said.

"Scarlett? Well, Scarlett did not know—it was all in such a hurry. Now go and bring in Mairi, Sheila; and we will speak about the theatre."

But there was to be no theatre for any of them that evening. Sheila was just about to leave the room to summon Mairi, when the small girl who had let Mackenzie into the house appeared and said—

"Please m'm, there is a young woman below who wishes to see you. She has a message to you from Mrs. Paterson."

"Mrs. Paterson?" Sheila said, wondering how Mrs. Lavender's henchwoman should have been entrusted with any such commission. "Will you ask her to come up?"

The girl came up stairs, looking rather frightened, and much out of breath.

"Please m'm, Mrs. Paterson has sent me to tell you, and would you please come as soon as it is convenient. Mrs. Lavender has died. It was quite sudden—only she recovered a little after the fit, and then sank; the doctor is there now; but he wasn't in time, it was all so sudden. Will you please come round, m'm?"

"Yes—I shall be there directly," said Sheila, too bewildered and stunned to think of the possibility of meeting her husband there.

The girl left; and Sheila still stood in the middle of the room apparently stupefied. That old woman had got into such a habit of talking about her ay-

proaching death that Sheila had ceased to believe her, and had grown to fancy that these morbid speculations were indulged in chiefly for the sake of shocking bystanders. But a dead man or a dead woman is suddenly invested with a great solemnity; and Sheila, with a pang of remorse, thought of the fashion in which she had suspected this old woman of a godless hypocrisy. She felt, too, that she had unjustly disliked Mrs. Lavender—that she had feared to go near her, and blamed her unfairly for many things that had happened. In her own way that old woman in Kensington Gore had been kind to her; perhaps the girl was a little ashamed of herself at this moment that she did not cry.

Her father went out with her and up to the house with the dusty ivy and the red curtains. How strangely like was the aspect of the house inside to the very picture that Mrs. Lavender had herself drawn of her death. Sheila could remember all the ghastly details that the old woman seemed to have a malicious delight in describing, and here they were—the shutters drawn down, the servants walking about on tiptoe, the strange silence in one particular room. The little shrivelled old body lay quite still and calm now; and yet as Sheila went to the bedside, she could hardly believe that within that forehead there was not some consciousness of the scene around. Lying almost in the same position the old woman, with a sardonic smile on her face, had spoken of the time when she should be speechless, sightless, and deaf, while Paterson would go about stealthily as if she was afraid the corpse would hear. Was it possible to believe that the dead body was not conscious at this moment that Paterson was really going about in that fashion—that the blinds were down, friends standing some little

distance from the bed, a couple of doctors talking to each other in the passage outside?

They went into another room, and then Sheila, with a sudden shiver, remembered that soon her husband would be coming, and might meet her and her father there.

"You have sent for Mr. Lavender?" she said, calmly, to Mrs. Paterson.

"No, ma'am," Paterson said, with more than her ordinary gravity and formality. "I did not know where to send for him. He left London some days ago. Perhaps you would read the letter, ma'am."

She offered Sheila an open letter. The girl saw that it was in her husband's handwriting; but she shrank from it as though she were violating the secrets of the grave.

"Oh no," she said, "I cannot do that."

"Mrs. Lavender, ma'am, meant you to read it, after she had had her will altered. She told me so. It is a very sad thing, ma'am, that she did not live to carry out her intentions; for she has been inquiring, ma'am, these last few days as to how she could leave everything to you, ma'am, which she intended, and now the other will——"

"Oh, don't talk about that!" said Sheila. It seemed to her that the dead body in the other room would be laughing hideously, if only it could, at this fulfilment of all the sardonic prophecies that Mrs. Lavender used to make.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," Paterson said, in the same formal way, as if she were a machine set to work in a particular direction, "I only mentioned the will to explain why Mrs. Lavender wished you to read this letter."

"Read the letter, Sheila," said her father.

The girl took it and carried it to the window. While she was there, old Mackenzie, who had fewer scruples about such matters, and who had the curiosity natural to a man of the world, said to Mrs. Paterson —not loud enough for Sheila to overhear—

"I suppose, then, the poor old lady has left her property to her nephew?"

"Oh no, sir," said Mrs. Paterson, somewhat sadly, for she fancied she was the bearer of bad news. "She had a will drawn out only a short time ago, and nearly everything is left to Mr. Ingram."

"To Mr. Ingram?"

"Yes," said the woman, amazed to see that Mackenzie's face, so far from evincing displeasure, seemed to be as delighted as it was surprised.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Paterson, "I was one of the witnesses. But Mrs. Lavender changed her mind; and was very anxious that everything should go to your daughter, if it could be done, and Mr. Appleyard, sir, was to come here to-morrow forenoon."

"And has Mr. Lavender got no money whatever?" said Sheila's father, with an air that convinced Mrs. Paterson that he was a revengeful man, and was glad that his son-in-law should be so severely punished.

"I don't know, sir," she replied, careful not to go beyond her own sphere.

Sheila came back from the window. She had taken a long time to read and ponder over that letter; though it was not a lengthy one. This was what Frank Lavender had written to his aunt:—"My dear Aunt Lavender,—I suppose when you read this you will think I am in a bad temper because of what you said to me. It is not so. But I am leaving London;

and I wish to hand over to you before I go the charge of my house, and to ask you to take possession of everything in it that does not belong to Sheila. These things are yours, as you know; and I have to thank you very much for the loan of them. I have to thank you for the far too liberal allowance you have made me for many years back. Will you think I have gone mad if I ask you to stop that now? The fact is, I am going to have a try at earning something, for the fun of the thing; and, to make the experiment satisfactory, I start to-morrow morning for a district in the West Highlands, where the most ingenious fellow I know couldn't get a penny-loaf on credit. You have been very good to me, Aunt Lavender; I wish I had made a better use of your kindness. So good-bye just now, and if ever I come back to London again I shall call on you and thank you in person.

"I am, your affectionate nephew,

"FRANK LAVENDER."

So far the letter was almost business-like. There was no reference to the causes which were sending him away from London, and which had already driven him to this extraordinary resolution about the money he got from his aunt. But at the end of the letter there was a brief postscript, apparently written at the last moment, the words of which were these:—

"Be kind to Sheila. Be as kind to her as I have been cruel to her. In going away from her I feel as though I were exiled by man and forsaken by God."

She came back from the window with the letter in her hand.

"I think you may read it, too, Papa," she said; for she was anxious that her father should know that Lavender had voluntarily surrendered this money before he was deprived of it. Then she went back to the window.

The slow rain fell from the dismal skies, on the pavement and the railings, and the now almost leafless trees. The atmosphere was filled with a thin white mist, and the people going by were hidden under umbrellas. It was a dreary picture enough; and yet Sheila was thinking of how much drearier such a day would be on some lonely coast in the north, with the hills obscured behind the rain, and the sea beating hopelessly on the sand. She thought of some small and damp Highland cottage, with narrow windows, a smell of wet wood about, and the monotonous drip from over the door. And it seemed to her that a stranger there would be very lonely, not knowing the ways or the speech of the simple folk, careless perhaps of his own comfort, and only listening to the plashing of the sea and the incessant rain on the bushes and on the pebbles of the beach. Was there any picture of desolation, she thought, like that of a sea under rain, with a slight fog obscuring the air, and with no wind to stir the pulse with the noise of waves? And if Frank Lavender had only gone as far as the Western Highlands, and was living in some house on the coast, how sad and still the Atlantic must have been all this wet forenoon, with the islands of Colonsay and Oronsay lying remote, and grey, and misty in the far and desolate plain of the sea.

"It will take a great deal of responsibility from me, sir," Mrs. Paterson said to old Mackenzie, who was absently thinking of all the strange possibilities

now opening out before him, "if you will tell me what is to be done. Mrs. Lavender had no relatives in London, except her nephew."

"Oh yes," said Mackenzie, waking up; "oh yes; we will see what is to be done. There will be the boat wanted for the funeral——"

He recalled himself with an impatient gesture.

"Bless me," he said, "what was I saying? You must ask some one else—you must ask Mr. Ingram. Hef you not sent for Mr. Ingram?"

"Oh yes, sir, I have sent to him; and he will most likely come in the afternoon."

"Then there are the executors mentioned in the will—that wass something you should know about; and they will tell you what to do. As for me, it is ferry little I will know about such things."

"Perhaps your daughter, sir," suggested Mrs. Paterson, "would tell me what she thinks should be done with the rooms——And as for luncheon, sir, if you would wait——"

"Oh, my daughter?" said Mr. Mackenzie, as if struck by a new idea, but determined all the same that Sheila should not have this new responsibility thrust on her. "My daughter?—well, you wass saying, mem, that my daughter would help you? Oh yes, but she is a ferry young thing, and you wass saying we must hef luncheon? Oh yes, but we will not give you so much trouble, and we hef luncheon ordered at the other house whatever; and there is the young girl there that we cannot leave all by herself. And you hef a great experience, mem, and whatever you do, that will be right; do not have any fear of that. And I will come round when you want me—oh yes, I will come round at any time; but my daughter, she is a

ferry young thing, and she would be of no use to you whatever—none whatever. And when Mr. Ingram comes you will send him round to the place where my daughter is, for we will want to see him, if he hass the time to come. But where is Sheila?"

Sheila had quietly left the room and stolen into the silent chamber in which the dead woman lay. They found her standing close by the bedside, almost in a trance.

"Sheila," said her father, taking her hand, "come away now, like a good girl. It is no use your waiting here; and Mairi—what will Mairi be doing?"

She suffered herself to be led away; and they went home and had luncheon, but the girl could not eat for the notion that somewhere or other a pair of eyes were looking at her, and were hideously laughing at her, as if to remind her of the prophecy of that old woman, that her friends would sit down to a comfortable meal and begin to wonder what sort of mourning they would have.

It was not until the evening that Ingram called. He had been greatly surprised to hear from Mrs. Paterson that Mr. Mackenzie had been there, along with his daughter; and he now expected to find the old King of Borva in a towering passion. He found him, on the contrary, as bland and as pleased as decency would admit of in view of the tragedy that had occurred in the morning; and, indeed, as Mackenzie had never seen Mrs. Lavender, there was less reason why he should wear the outward semblance of grief. Sheila's father asked her to go out of the room for a little while; and when she and Mairi had gone, he said cheerfully—

"Well, Mr. Ingram, and it is a rich man you are at last."

"Mrs. Paterson said she had told you," Ingram said, with a shrug. "You never expected to find me rich, did you?"

"Never," said Mackenzie, frankly. "But it is a ferry good thing—oh yes, it is a ferry good thing—to hef money and be independent of people. And you will make a good use of it, I know."

"You don't seem disposed, sir, to regret that Lavender has been robbed of what should have belonged to him?"

"Oh, not at all," said Mackenzie, gravely and cautiously, for he did not want his plans to be displayed prematurely. "But I hef no quarrel with him; so you will not think I am glad to hef the money taken away for that. Oh no; I hef seen a great many men and women; and it wass no strange thing that these two young ones living all by themselves in London, should hef a quarrel. But it will come all right again if we do not make too much about it. If they like one another, they will soon come together again, tek my word for it, Mr. Ingram; and I hef seen a great many men and women. And as for the money —well, as for the money, I hef plenty for my Sheila, and she will not starve when I die, no, nor before that either; and as for the poor old woman that has died, I am ferry glad she left her money to one that will make a good use of it, and will not throw it away whatever."

"Oh, but you know, Mr. Mackenzie, you are congratulating me without cause. I must tell you how the matter stands. The money does not belong to me at all—Mrs. Lavender never intended it should. It was meant to go to Sheila——"

"*Oh, I know, I know*," said Mr. Mackenzie, with a

wave of his hand. "I wass hearing all that from the woman at the house. But how will you know what Mrs. Lavender intended? You hef only that woman's story of it. And here is the will, and you hef the money, and—and——"

Mackenzie hesitated for a moment; and then said with a sudden vehemence—

"——and, by Kott, you shall keep it!"

Ingram was a trifle startled.

"But look here, sir," he said, in a tone of expostulation, "you make a mistake. I myself know Mrs. Lavender's intentions. I don't go by any story of Mrs. Paterson's. Mrs. Lavender made over the money to me with express injunctions to place it at the disposal of Sheila whenever I should see fit. Oh, there's no mistake about it, so you need not protest, sir. If the money belonged to me, I should be delighted to keep it. No man in the country more desires to be rich than I; so don't fancy I am flinging away a fortune out of generosity. If any rich and kind-hearted old lady will send me £5,000 or £10,000, you will see how I shall stick to it. But the simple truth is, this money is not mine at all. It was never intended to be mine. It belongs to Sheila."

Ingram talked in a very matter-of-fact way; the old man feared what he said was true.

"Ay, it is a ferry good story," said Mackenzie, cautiously, "and may be it is all true. And you wass saying you would like to hef money?"

"I most decidedly should like to have money."

"Well, then," said the old man, watching his friend's face, "there iss no one to say that the story is true; and who will believe it? And if Sheila wass to come to you and say she did not believe it, and she

would not hef the money from you, you would hef to keep it, eh?"

Ingram's sallow face blushed crimson.

"I don't know what you mean," he said, stiffly. "Do you propose to pervert the girl's mind, and make me a party to a fraud?"

"Oh, there is no use getting into an anger," said Mackenzie, suavely, "when common sense will do as well whatever. And there wass no perversion, and there wass no fraud talked about. It wass just this, Mr. Ingram, that if the old lady's will leaves you her property, who will you be getting to believe that she did not mean to give it to you?"

"I tell you now whom she meant to give it to," said Ingram, still somewhat hotly.

"Oh yes, oh yes, that is ferry well. But who will believe it?"

"Good heavens, sir, who will believe I could be such a fool as to fling away this property if it belonged to me?"

"They will think you a fool to do it now—yes, that is sure enough," said Mackenzie.

"I don't care what they think. And it seems rather odd, Mr. Mackenzie, that you should be trying to deprive your own daughter of what belongs to her."

"Oh, my daughter is ferry well off whatever—she does not want anyone's money," said Mackenzie; and then a new notion struck him. "Will you tell me this, Mr. Ingram? If Mrs. Lavender left you her property in this way, what for did she want to change her will, eh?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I refused to take the responsibility. She was anxious to have this money given to Sheila so that Lavender should not touch it —and I don't think it was a wise intention, for there is not a prouder man in the world than Lavender, and

I know that Sheila would not consent to hold a penny that did not equally belong to him. However, that was her notion; and I was the first victim of it. I protested against it; and I suppose that set her to inquiring whether the money could not be absolutely bequeathed to Sheila direct. I don't know anything about it myself; but that's how the matter stands as far as I'm concerned."

"But you will think it over, Mr. Ingram," said Mackenzie quietly; "you will think it over and be in no hurry. It is not every man that hass a lot of money given to him. And it is no wrong to my Sheila at all: for she will hef quite plenty; and she would be ferry sorry to take the money away from you, that is sure enough; and you will not be hasty, Mr. Ingram, but be cautious and reasonable, and you will see the money will do you far more good than it would do to my Sheila."

Ingram began to think that he had tied a millstone round his neck.

CHAPTER IX.

In Exile.

ONE evening, in the olden time, Lavender and Sheila and Ingram and old Mackenzie were all sitting high up on the rocks near Borvabost, chatting to each other, and watching the red light pale on the bosom of the Atlantic as the sun sank behind the edge of the world. Ingram was smoking a wooden pipe. Lavender sat with Sheila's hand in his. The old King of Borva was discoursing of the fishing populations round the western coasts, and of their various ways and habits.

"I wish I could have seen Tarbert," Lavender was saying, "but the *Iona* just passes the mouth of the little harbour as she comes up Loch Fyne. I know

two or three men who go there every year to paint the fishing life of the place. It is an odd little place, isn't it?"

"Tarbert?" said Mr. Mackenzie; "you wass wanting to know about Tarbert? Ah, well, it is getting to be a better place now, but a year or two ago it wass ferry like hell. Oh, yes, it wass, Sheila, so you need not say anything. And this wass the way of it, Mr. Lavender, that the trawling was not made legal then, and the men they were just like teffles, with the swearing, and the drinking, and the fighting that went on; and if you went into the harbour in the open day, you would find them drunk, and fighting, and some of them with blood on their faces, for it wass a ferry wild time. It wass many a one will say that the Tarbert men would run down the police-boat some dark night. And what wass the use of catching the trawlers now and again, and taking their boats and their nets to be sold at Greenock, when they would go themselves over to Greenock, to the auction, and buy them back? Oh, it wass a great deal of money they made then—I hef heard of a crew of eight men getting £30 each man in the course of one night, and that not seldom mirover."

"But why didn't the Government put it down?" Lavender asked.

"Well, you see," Mackenzie answered, with the air of a man well acquainted with the difficulties of ruling; "you see that it wass not quite sure that the trawling did much harm to the fishing. And the *Jackal* —that wass the Government steamer—she wass not much good in getting the better of the Tarbert men, who are ferry good with their boats in the rowing, and are ferry cunning whatever. For the buying boats they would go out to sea, and take the herring there,

and then the trawlers they would sink their nets and come home in the morning as if they had not caught one fish, although the boat would be white with the scales of the herring. And what is more, sir, the Government knew ferry well that if trawling wass put down then, there would be a ferry good many murders; for the Tarbert men, when they came home to drink whisky, and wash the whisky down with porter, they were ready to fight anybody."

"It must be a delightful place to live in," Lavender said.

"Oh, but it is ferry different now," Mackenzie continued, "ferry different. The men they are nearly all Good Templars now, and there is no drinking whatever, and there is reading-rooms and such things, and the place is ferry quiet and respectable."

"I hear," Ingram remarked, "that good people attribute the change to moral suasion, and that wicked people put it down to want of money."

"Papa, this boy will have to be put to bed," Sheila said.

"Well," Mackenzie answered, "there is not so much money in the place as there wass in the old times. The shopkeepers do not make so much money as before, when the men were wild and drunk in the daytime, and had plenty to spend when the police-boat did not catch them. But the fishermen they are ferry much better without the money; and I can say for them, Mr. Lavender, that there is no better fishermen on the coast. They are ferry fine, tall men; and they are ferry well dressed in their blue clothes; and they are manly fellows, whether they are drunk or whether they are sober. Now look at this, sir, that in the worst of weather they will neffer tek whisky with them when they

go out to the sea at night, for they think it is cowardly. And they are ferry fine fellows and gentlemanly in their ways, and they are ferry good-natured to strangers."

"I have heard that of them on all hands," Lavender said, "and some day I hope to put their civility and good fellowship to the proof."

That was merely the idle conversation of a summer evening; no one paid any further attention to it, nor did even Lavender himself think again of his vaguely-expressed hope of some day visiting Tarbert. Let us now shift the scene of this narrative to Tarbert itself.

When you pass from the broad and blue waters of Loch Fyne into the narrow and rocky channel leading to Tarbert harbour, you find before you an almost circular bay, round which stretches an irregular line of white houses. There is an abundance of fishing-craft in the harbour, lying in careless and picturesque groups, with their brown hulls and spars sending a ruddy reflection down on the lapping water, which is green under the shadow of each boat. Along the shore stand the tall poles on which the fishermen dry their nets; and above these, on the summit of a rocky crag, rise the ruins of an old castle, with the daylight shining through the empty windows. Beyond the houses, again, lie successive lines of hills, at this moment lit up by shafts of sunlight that lend a glowing warmth and richness to the fine colours of a late autumn. The hills are red and brown with rusted bracken and heather; and here and there the smooth waters of the bay catch a tinge of their varied hues. In one of the fishing-smacks that lie almost underneath the shadow of the tall crag on which the castle ruins stand, an artist has put up a rough-and-ready easel, and is apparently busy at work painting a group of boats just beyond. Some

indication of the rich colours of the craft—their ruddy sails, brown nets and bladders, and their varnished but not painted hulls—already appears on the canvas; and by and by some vision may arise of the far hills in their soft autumnal tints and of the bold blue and white sky moving overhead. Perhaps the old man who is smoking in the stern of one of the boats has been placed there on purpose. A boy seated on some nets occasionally casts an anxious glance towards the painter, as if to inquire when his penance will be over.

A small open boat, with a heap of stones for ballast, and with no great elegance in shape of rigging, comes slowly in from the mouth of the harbour, and is gently run alongside the boat in which the man is painting. A fresh-coloured young fellow, with plenty of curly brown hair, who has dressed himself as a yachtsman, calls out—

"Lavender, do you know the *White Rose*, a big schooner yacht, about eighty tons I should think?"

"Yes," Lavender said, without turning round or taking his eyes off the canvas.

"Whose is she?"

"Lord Newstead's."

"Well, either he or his skipper hailed me just now and wanted to know whether you were here. I said you were. The fellow asked me if I was going into the harbour. I said I was. So he gave me a message for you; that they would hang about outside for half an hour or so, if you would go out to them, and take a run up to Ardishaig."

"I can't, Johnny."

"I'd take you out, you know."

"I don't want to go."

"But look here, Lavender," said the younger man

seizing hold of Lavender's boat, and causing the easel to shake dangerously; "he asked me to luncheon, too."

"Why don't you go, then?" was the only reply, uttered rather absently.

"I can't go without you."

"Well, I don't mean to go."

The younger man looked vexed for a moment, and then said, in a tone of expostulation—

"You know it is very absurd of you going on like this, Lavender. No fellow can paint decently if he gets out of bed in the middle of the night and waits for daylight to rush up to his easel. How many hours have you been at work already to-day? If you don't give your eyes a rest, they will get colour-blind to a dead certainty. Do you think you will paint the whole place off the face of the earth, now that the other fellows have gone?"

"I can't be bothered talking to you, Johnny. You'll make me throw something at you. Go away."

"I think it's rather mean, you know," continued the persistent Johnny, "for a fellow like you, who doesn't need it, to come and fill the market all at once, while we unfortunate devils can scarcely get a crust. And there are two heron just round the point, and I have my breechloader and a dozen cartridges here."

"Go away, Johnny,"—that was all the answer he got.

"I'll go out and tell Lord Newstead that you are a cantankerous brute. I suppose he'll have the decency to offer me luncheon; and I dare say I could get him a shot at these heron. You are a fool not to come, Lavender;" and, so saying, the young man put out again, and he was heard to go away talking to himself about obstinate idiots, and greed, and the certainty of getting a shot at the heron.

When he had quite gone, Lavender, who had scarcely raised his eyes from his work, suddenly put down his palette and brushes—he almost dropped them, indeed—and quickly put up both his hands to his head, pressing them on the side of his temples. The old fisherman in the boat beyond noticed this strange movement, and forthwith caught a rope, hauled the boat across a stretch of water, and then came scrambling over bowsprits, lowered sails, and nets, to where Lavender had just sat down.

"Wass there anything the matter, sir?" he said, with much evidence of concern.

"My head is a little bad, Donald," Lavender said, still pressing his hands on his temple, as if to get rid of some strange feeling; "I wish you would pull in to the shore and get me some whisky."

"Oh ay," said the old man, hastily scrambling into the little black boat lying beside the smack; "and it is no wonder to me this will come to you, sir, for I hef never seen any of the gentlemen so long at the pentin as you—from the morning till the night—and it is no wonder to me this will come to you. But I will get you the whushkey—it is a grand thing, the whushkey."

The old fisherman was not long in getting ashore, and running up to the cottage in which Lavender lived, and getting a bottle of whisky and a glass. Then he got down to the boat again, and was surprised that he could nowhere see Mr. Lavender on board the smack. Perhaps he had lain down on the nets in the bottom of the boat.

When Donald got out to the smack, he found the young man lying insensible, his face white, and his teeth clenched. With something of a cry, the old fisherman jumped into the boat, knelt down, and pro-

ceeded in a rough and ready fashion to force some whisky into Lavender's mouth.

"Oh ay, oh yes, it is a grand thing, the whushkey," he muttered to himself; "oh yes, sir, you must hef some more—it is no matter if you will choke—it is ferry goot whushkey, and will do you no harm whatever—and, oh yes, sir, that is ferry well, and you are all right again, and you will sit quite quiet now, and you will hef a little more whushkey."

The young man looked round him.

"Have you been ashore, Donald? Oh, yes; I suppose so. Did I fall down? Well, I am all right now; it was the glare of the sea that made me giddy. Take a dram for yourself, Donald."

"There is but one glass, sir," said Donald, who had picked up something of the notions of gentlefolks, "but I will just tek the bottle;" and so, to avoid drinking out of the same glass (which was rather a small one), he was good enough to take a pull, and a strong pull, at the black bottle. Then he heaved a sigh, and wiped the top of the bottle with his sleeve.

"Yes, as I was saying, sir, there was none of the gentlemen I hef effer seen in Tarbert will keep at the pentin so long ass you; and many of them will be stronger ass you and will be more accustomed to it whatever. But when a man iss making money—" and Donald shook his head; he knew it was useless to argue.

"But I am not making money, Donald," Lavender said, still looking a trifle pale. "I doubt whether I have made as much as you have since I came to Tarbert."

"Oh yes," said Donald, contentedly, "all the gentlemen will say that. They never hef any money. But wass you ever with them when they could not get a dram because they had no money to pay for it?"

Donald's test of impecuniosity could not be gainsayed. Lavender laughed, and bade him get back into the other boat.

"Deed I will not," said Donald, sturdily.

Lavender stared at him.

"Oh no; you wass doing quite enough the day already, or you would not hef tumbled into the boat whatever. And supposing that you wass to hef tumbled into the water, you would have been trooned as sure as you wass alive."

"And a good job too, Donald," said the younger man, idly looking at the lapping green water.

Donald shook his head gravely.

"You would not say that if you had friends of yours that wass trooned, and if you had seen them when they went down in the water."

"They say it is an easy death, Donald."

"They neffer tried it that said that," said the old fisherman, gloomily. "It wass one day the son of my sister wass coming over from Saltcoats—but I hef no wish to speak of it; and that wass but one among ferry many that I have known."

"How long is it since you were in the Lewis, did you say?" Lavender asked, changing the subject. Donald was accustomed to have the talk suddenly diverted into this channel. He could not tell why the young English stranger wanted him continually to be talking about the Lewis.

"Oh, it is many and many a year ago, as I hef said; and you will know far more about the Lewis than I will. But Stornoway, that is a fine big town; and I hef a cousin there that keeps a shop, and is a ferry rich man whatever, and many's the time he will ask me to come and see him. And if the Lord be spared, maybe I will some day."

"You mean if you be spared, Donald."

"Oh aye; it is all wan," said Donald.

Lavender had brought with him some bread and cheese in a piece of paper, for luncheon; and this store of frugal provisions having been opened out, the old fisherman was invited to join in; an invitation he gravely, but not eagerly, accepted. He took off his blue bonnet and said grace; then he took the bread and cheese in his hand, and looked round inquiringly. There was a stone jar of water in the bottom of the boat; that was not what Donald was looking after. Lavender handed him the black bottle he had brought out from the cottage, which was more to his mind. And then, this humble meal despatched, the old man was persuaded to go back to his post, and Lavender continued his work.

The short afternoon was drawing to a close when young Johnny Eyre came sailing in from Loch Fyne, himself and a boy of ten or twelve managing that crank little boat with its top-heavy sails.

"Are you at work yet, Lavender?" he said. "I never saw such a beggar. It's getting quite dark."

"What sort of luncheon did Newstead give you, Johnny?"

"Oh, something worth going for, I can tell you. You want to live in Tarbert for a month or two to find out the value of decent cooking and good wine. He was awfully surprised when I described this place to him. He wouldn't believe you were living here in a cottage—I said a garret, for I pitched it hot and strong, mind you. I said you were living in a garret, that you never saw a razor, and lived on oatmeal porridge and whisky, and that your only amusement was going out at night and risking your neck in this

delightful boat of mine. You should have seen him examining this remarkable vessel. And there were two ladies on board, and they were asking after you, too."

"Who were they?"

"I don't know. I didn't catch their names when I was introduced; but the noble skipper called one of them Polly."

"Oh, I know."

"Ain't you coming ashore, Lavender? You can't see to work now."

"All right. I shall put my traps ashore; and then I'll have a run with you down Loch Fyne, if you like, Johnny."

"Well, I don't like," said the handsome lad, frankly; "for it's looking rather squally about. It seems to me you're bent on drowning yourself. Before those other fellows went, they came to the conclusion that you had committed a murder."

"Did they really?" Lavender said, with little interest.

"And if you go away and live in that wild place you were talking of during the winter, they will be quite sure of it. Why, man, you'd come back with your hair turned white. You might as well think of living by yourself at the Arctic Pole."

Neither Johnny Eyre nor any of the men who had just left Tarbert knew anything of Frank Lavender's recent history; and Lavender himself was not disposed to be communicative. They would know soon enough when they went up to London. In the meantime they were surprised to find that Lavender's habits were very singularly altered. He had grown miserly. They laughed when he told them he had no money; and he did not seek to persuade them of the fact; but it was clear, at all events, that none of them

lived so frugally, or worked so anxiously, as he. Then, when his work was done in the evening, and when they met alternately at each other's rooms, to dine off mutton and potatoes, with a glass of whisky, and a pipe, and a game of cards to follow, what was the meaning of those sudden fits of silence that would strike in when the general hilarity was at its pitch? And what was the meaning of the utter recklessness he displayed when they would go out of an evening in their open sailing-boats to shoot sea-fowl, or make a voyage along the rocky coast in the dead of night, to wait for the dawn to show them the haunts of the seals? The Lavender they had met occasionally in London was a fastidious, dilettante, self-possessed, and yet not disagreeable young fellow; this man was almost pathetically anxious about his work, oftentimes he was morose and silent, and then again there was no sort of danger or difficulty he was not ready to plunge into when they were sailing about that iron-bound coast. They could not make it out; but the joke among themselves was that he had committed a murder, and therefore had grown reckless.

This Johnny Eyre was not much of an artist; but he liked the society of artists; he had a little money of his own, plenty of time, and a love of boating and shooting; and so he had pitched his tent at Tarbert, and was proud to cherish the delusion that he was working hard and earning fame and wealth. As a matter of fact, he never earned anything; but he had very good spirits, and living in Tarbert is cheap.

From the moment that Lavender had come to the place, Johnny Eyre made him his special companion. He had a great respect for a man who could shoot anything anywhere; and when he and Lavender came

back together from a cruise, there was no use saying which had actually done the brilliant deeds the evidence of which was carried ashore. But Lavender, oddly enough, knew little about sailing; and Johnny was pleased to assume the airs of an instructor on this point; his only difficulty being that his pupil had more than the ordinary hardihood of an ignoramus, and was inclined to do reckless things even after he had sufficient skill to know that they were dangerous.

Lavender got into the small boat, taking his canvas with him, but leaving his easel in the fishing-smack. He pulled himself and Johnny Eyre ashore; they scrambled up the rocks and into the road; and then they went into the small white cottage in which Lavender lived. The picture was, for greater safety, left in Lavender's bedroom, which already contained about a dozen canvases with sketches in various stages on them. Then he went out to his friend again.

"I've had a long day to-day, Johnny. I wish you'd go out with me; the excitement of a squall would clear one's brain, I fancy."

"Oh, I'll go out if you like," Eyre said; "but I shall take very good care to run in before the squall comes, if there's any about. I don't think there will be, after all. I fancied I saw a flash of lightning about half an hour ago, down in the south; but nothing has come of it. There are some curlew about; and the guillemots are in thousands. You don't seem to care about shooting guillemots, Lavender."

"Well, you see, potting a bird that is sitting on the water——" said Lavender with a shrug.

"Oh, it isn't as easy as you might imagine. Of course, you could kill them if you liked, but everybody ain't such a swell as you are with a gun; and,

mind you, it's uncommonly awkward to catch the right moment for firing when the bird goes bobbing up and down on the waves, disappearing altogether every second. I think it's very good fun myself. It is very exciting when you don't know the moment the bird will dive, and whether you can afford to go any nearer. And as for shooting them on the water, you have to do that; for when do you get a chance of shooting them flying?"

"I don't see much necessity for shooting them at any time," said Lavender, as he went down to the shore again, "but I am glad to see you get some amusement out of it. Have you got cartridges with you? Is your gun in the boat?"

"Yes. Come along. We'll have a run out, anyhow."

When they pulled out again to that cockle-shell craft with its stone ballast and big brown mainsail, the boy was sent ashore, and the two companions set out by themselves. By this time the sun had gone down, and a strange green twilight was shining over the sea. As they got further out, the dusky shores seemed to have a pale mist hanging around them; but there were no clouds on the hills, for a clear sky shone overhead, awaiting the coming of the stars. Strange, indeed, was the silence out here, broken only by the lapping of the water on the sides of the boat, and the calling of birds in the distance. Far away the orange ray of a lighthouse began to quiver in the lambent dusk. The pale green light on the waves did not die out; but the shadows grew darker, so that Eyre, with his gun close at hand, could not make out his groups of guillemots, although he heard them calling all around. They had come out too late, indeed, for any such purpose.

Thither, on those beautiful evenings, after his day's work was over, Lavender was accustomed to come, either by himself or with his present companion. Johnny Eyre did not intrude on his solitude; he was invariably too eager to get a shot, his chief delight being to get to the bow, to let the boat drift for a while silently through the waves, so that she might come unawares on some flock of sea-birds. Lavender, sitting in the stern, with the tiller in his hand, was really alone in this world of water and sky, with all the majesty of the night and the stars around him.

And on these occasions he used to sit and dream of the beautiful time long ago in Loch Roag, when nights such as these used to come over the Atlantic, and find Sheila and himself sailing on the peaceful waters, or seated high up on the rocks listening to the murmur of the tide. Here was the same strange silence, the same solemn and pale light in the sky, the same mystery of the moving plain all around them that seemed somehow to be alive and yet voiceless and sad. Many a time his heart became so full of recollections, that he had almost called aloud "Sheila! Sheila!" and waited for the sea and the sky to answer him with the sound of her voice. In these bygone days he had pleased himself with the fancy that the girl was somehow the product of all the beautiful aspects of nature around her. It was the sea that was in her eyes; it was the fair sunlight that shone in her face; the breath of her life was the breath of the moorland winds. He had written verses about this fancy of hers; and he had conveyed them secretly to her, sure that she, at least, would find no defects in them. And many a time, far away from Loch Roag, and from Sheila, lines of this conceit would wander

through his brain, set to the saddest of all music, the music of irreparable loss. What did they say to him now that he recalled them like some half-forgotten voice out of the strange past?—

For she, and the clouds, and the breezes were one,
And the hills and the sea had conspired with the sun
To charm and bewilder all men with the grace
They combined and conferred on her wonderful face.

* * * * *

The sea lapped around the boat; the green light on the waves grew less intense; in the silence the first of the stars came out; and somehow the time in which he had seen Sheila in these rare and magical colours seemed to become more and more remote.

* * * * *

An angel in passing looked downward and smiled,
And carried to heaven the fame of the child;
And then what the waves and the sky and the sun
And the tremulous breath of the hills had begun,
Required but one touch. To finish the whole,
God loved her, and gave her a beautiful soul!

And what had he done with this rare treasure entrusted to him? His companions, jesting among themselves, had said that he had committed a murder; in his own heart there was something at this moment of a murderer's remorse.

Johnny Eyre uttered a short cry. Lavender looked ahead, and saw that some black object was disappearing among the waves.

"What a fright I got!" Eyre said, with a laugh. "I never saw the fellow come near; and he came up just below the bowsprit. He came heeling over as quiet as a mouse. I say, Lavender, I think we might as well cut it now; my eyes are quite bewildered with the light on the water; I couldn't make out a kraken if it was coming across our bows."

"Don't be in a hurry, Johnny. We'll put her out

a bit, and then let her drift back. I want to tell you a story."

"Oh, all right," he said; and so they put her head round, and soon she was lying over before the breeze, and slowly drawing away from those outlines of the coast which showed them where Tarbert harbour cut into the land. And then, once more, they let her drift, and young Eyre took a nip of whisky and settled himself so as to hear Lavender's story, whatever it might be.

"You knew I was married?"

"Yes."

"Didn't you ever wonder why my wife did not come here?"

"Why should I wonder? Plenty of fellows have to spend half the year apart from their wives; the only thing in your case I couldn't understand was the necessity for your doing it. For you know that's all nonsense about your want of funds."

"It isn't nonsense, Johnny. But now, if you like, I will tell you why my wife has never come here."

Then he told the story, out there under the stars, with no thought of interruption, for there was a world of moving water around them. It was the first time he had let anyone into his confidence; and perhaps the darkness aided his revelations; but at any rate he went over all the old time until it seemed to his companion that he was talking to himself, so aimless and desultory were his pathetic reminiscences. He called her Sheila, though Eyre had never heard her name. He spoke of her father as though Eyre must have known him. And yet this rambling series of confession, and self-reproaches, and tender memories, did form a certain sort of narrative, so that the young fellow

sitting quietly in the boat there got a pretty fair notion of what had happened.

"You are an unlucky fellow," he said to Lavender. "I never heard anything like that. But you know you must have exaggerated a good deal about it—I should like to hear her story. I am sure you could not have treated her like that."

"God knows how I did, but the truth is just as I have told you; and although I was blind enough at the time, I can read the whole story now in letters of fire. I hope you will never have such a thing constantly before your eyes, Johnny."

The lad was silent for some time; and then he said rather timidly—

"Do you think, Lavender, she knows how sorry you are?"

"If she did, what good would that do?" said the other.

"Women are awfully forgiving, you know," Johnny said, in a hesitating fashion. "I—I don't think it is quite fair not to give her a chance—a chance of—of being generous, you know. You know, I think the better a woman is, the more inclined she is to be charitable to other folks who mayn't be quite up to the mark, you know; and you see, it ain't everyone who can claim to be always doing the right thing; and the next best thing to that is to be sorry for what you've done and try to do better. It's rather cheeky, you know, my advising you—or trying to make you pluck up your spirits—but I'll tell you what it is, Lavender, if I knew her well enough I'd go straight to her to-morrow, and I'd put in a good word for you, and tell her some things she doesn't know, and you'd see if she wouldn't write you a letter, or even come and see you——"

"That is all nonsense, Johnny, though it's very good of you to think of it. The mischief I have done isn't to be put aside by the mere writing of a letter——"

"But it seems to me," Johnny said, with some warmth, "that you are as unfair to her as to yourself in not giving her a chance. You don't know how willing she may be to overlook everything that is past——"

"If she were, I am not fit to go near her. I couldn't have the cheek to try, Johnny."

"But what more can you be than sorry for what is past?" said the younger fellow, persistently. "And you don't know how pleased it makes a good woman to give her a chance of forgiving anybody. And if we were all to set up for being archangels, and if there was to be no sort of getting back for us after we had made a slip, where should we be? And in place of going to her, and making it all right, you start away for the Sound of Islay, and, by Jove, won't you find out what spending a winter under these Jura mountains means!"

A flash of lightning—somewhere down among the Arran hills—interrupted the speaker, and drew the attention of the two young men to the fact that in the east and south-east the stars were no longer visible, while something of a brisk breeze had sprung up.

"This breeze will take us back splendidly," Johnny said, getting ready again for the run in to Tarbert.

He had scarcely spoken when Lavender called attention to a fishing-smack that was apparently making for the harbour. With all sails set, she was sweeping by them like some black phantom across the dark plain of the sea. They could not make out the figures on board of her; but as she passed, some one called out to them.

"What did he say?" Lavender asked.

"I don't know," his companion said, "but it was some sort of warning, I suppose. By Jove, Lavender, what is that?"

Behind them there was a strange hissing and rumbling noise that the wind brought along to them, but nothing could be seen.

"Rain, isn't it?" Lavender said.

"There never was rain like that," his companion said. "That is a squall, and it will be here presently. We must haul down the sails—for God's sake, look sharp, Lavender!"

There was certainly no time to lose, for the noise behind them was increasing and deepening into a roar; and the heavens had grown black overhead, so that the spars and ropes of the crank little boat could scarcely be made out. They had just got the sails down when the first gust of the squall struck the boat as with a blow of iron, and sent her staggering forward into the trough of the sea. Then all around them came the fury of the storm; and the cause of the sound they had heard was apparent in the foaming water that was torn and scattered abroad by the gale. Up from the black south-east came the fierce hurricane, sweeping everything before it, and hurling this creaking and straining boat about as if it were a cork. They could see little of the sea around them, but they could hear the awful noise of it, and they knew they were being swept along on those hurrying waves, towards a coast which was invisible in the blackness of the night.

"Johnny, we'll never make the harbour. I can't see a light," Lavender cried. "Hadn't we better try to keep her up the loch?"

"We *must* make the harbour," his companion said; "she can't stand this much longer."

Blinding torrents of rain were now being driven down by the force of the wind, so that all around them nothing was visible but a wild boiling and seething of clouds and waves. Eyre was up at the bow, trying to catch some glimpse of the outlines of the coast, or to make out some light that would show them where the entrance to Tarbert harbour lay. If only some lurid shaft of lightning would pierce the gloom!—for they knew that they were being driven headlong on an iron-bound coast, and amid all the noise of the wind and the sea they listened with a fear that had no words for the first roar of the waves along the rocks.

Suddenly Lavender heard a shrill scream—almost like the cry that a hare gives when it finds the dog's fangs in its neck; and at the same moment, amid all the darkness of the night, a still blacker object seemed to start out of the gloom, right ahead of them. The boy had no time to shout any warning beyond that cry of despair; for with a wild crash the boat struck on the rocks, rose and struck again, and was then dashed over by a heavy sea, both of its occupants being thrown into the fierce swirls of foam that were dashing in and through the rocky channels. Strangely enough they were thrown together; and Lavender, clinging to the seaweed, instinctively laid hold of his companion just as the latter appeared to be slipping into the gulf beneath.

"Johnny," he cried, "hold on! hold on to me, or we shall both go in a minute."

But the lad had no life left in him, and lay like a log there, while each wave that struck and rolled

hissing and gurgling through the channels between the rocks, seemed to drag at him and seek to suck him down into the darkness. With one despairing effort Lavender struggled to get him further up on the slippery seaweed, and succeeded. But his success had lost him his own vantage-ground; and he knew that he was going down into the swirling waters beneath, close by the broken boat that was still being dashed about by the waves.

CHAPTER X.

"Hame fain would I be."

UNEXPECTED circumstances had detained Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter in London long after everybody else had left; but at length they were ready to start for their projected trip into Switzerland. On the day before their departure Ingram dined with them —on his own invitation. He had got into a habit of letting them know when it would suit him to devote an evening to their instruction; and it was difficult, indeed, to say which of the two ladies submitted the more readily and meekly to the dictatorial enunciation of his opinions. Mrs. Kavanagh, it is true, sometimes dissented in so far as a smile indicated dissent; but her daughter scarcely reserved to herself so much liberty. Mr. Ingram had taken her in hand; and expected of her the obedience and respect due to his superior age.

And yet, somehow or other, he occasionally found himself indirectly soliciting the advice of this gentle, clear-eyed, and clear-headed young person, more especially as regarded the difficulties surrounding Sheila; and sometimes a chance remark of hers, uttered in a timid, or careless, or even mocking fashion, would

a bit, and then let her drift back. I want to tell you a story."

"Oh, all right," he said; and so they put her head round, and soon she was lying over before the breeze, and slowly drawing away from those outlines of the coast which showed them where Tarbert harbour cut into the land. And then, once more, they let her drift, and young Eyre took a nip of whisky and settled himself so as to hear Lavender's story, whatever it might be.

"You knew I was married?"

"Yes."

"Didn't you ever wonder why my wife did not come here?"

"Why should I wonder? Plenty of fellows have to spend half the year apart from their wives; the only thing in your case I couldn't understand was the necessity for your doing it. For you know that's all nonsense about your want of funds."

"It isn't nonsense, Johnny. But now, if you like, I will tell you why my wife has never come here."

Then he told the story, out there under the stars, with no thought of interruption, for there was a world of moving water around them. It was the first time he had let anyone into his confidence; and perhaps the darkness aided his revelations; but at any rate he went over all the old time until it seemed to his companion that he was talking to himself, so aimless and desultory were his pathetic reminiscences. He called her Sheila, though Eyre had never heard her name. He spoke of her father as though Eyre must have known him. And yet this rambling series of confession, and self-reproaches, and tender memories, did form a certain sort of narrative, so that the young fellow

one takes account of the temptations of the rich. You have people educated from their infancy to imagine that the whole world was made for them—every wish they have, gratified—every day showing them people dependent on them and grateful for favours; and no allowance is made for such a temptation to become haughty, self-willed, and overbearing. But of course it stands to reason that the rich never have justice done them in plays and stories; for the people who write are poor."

"Not all of them."

"But enough to strike an average of injustice. And it is very hard. For it is the rich who buy books and who take boxes at the theatres, and then they find themselves grossly abused; whereas the humble peasant who can scarcely read at all, and who never pays more than sixpence for a seat in the gallery, is flattered, and coaxed, and caressed until one wonders whether the source of virtue is the drinking of sour ale. Mr. Ingram, you do it yourself. You impress Mamma and me with the belief that we are miserable sinners if we are not continually doing some act of charity. Well, that is all very pleasant and necessary, in moderation; but you don't find the poor folks so very anxious to live for other people. They don't care much what becomes of us. They take your port wine and flannels as if they were conferring a favour on you; but as for *your* condition and prospects, in this world and the next, they don't trouble much about that. Now, Mamma, just wait a moment——"

"I will not. You are a bad girl," said Mrs. Kavanagh, severely. "Here has Mr. Ingram been teaching you and making you better for ever so long back, and you pretend to accept his counsel and reform

yourself; and then all at once you break out, and throw down the tablets of the law, and conduct yourself like a heathen."

"Because I want him to explain, Mamma. I suppose he considers it wicked of us to start for Switzerland to-morrow. The money we shall spend in travelling might have despatched a cargo of muskets to some missionary station, so that——"

"Cecilia!"

"Oh no," Ingram said, carelessly, and nursing his knee with both his hands as usual, "travelling is not wicked—it is only unreasonable. A traveller, you know, is a person who has a house in one town, and who goes to live in a house in another town, in order to have the pleasure of paying for both."

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But Ingram was not in a mood for talking seriously; and he waited to hear Mrs. Lorraine strike in with some calmly audacious invitation. She did not, however; and he turned round from her mother to question her. He was surprised to find that her eyes were fixed on the ground, and that something like a tinge of colour was in her face. He turned rapidly away again.

"Well, Mrs. Kavanagh," he said, with a fine air of indifference, "the last time we spoke about that, I was not in the difficulty I am in at present. How could I go travelling just now, without knowing how to regulate my daily expenses? Am I to travel with six white horses and silver bells, or trudge on foot with a wallet?"

"But you know quite well," said Mrs. Lorraine, warmly—"you know you will not touch that money that Mrs. Lavender has left you."

"Oh, pardon me," he said; "I should rejoice to have it if it did not properly belong to someone else. And the difficulty is that Mr. Mackenzie is obviously very anxious that neither Mr. Lavender nor Sheila should have it. If Sheila gets it, of course she will give it to her husband. Now, if it is not to be given to her, do you think I should regard the money with any particular horror, and refuse to touch it? That would be very romantic, perhaps; but I should be sorry, you know, to give my friends the most disquieting doubts about my sanity. Romance goes out of a man's head when the hair gets grey."

"Until a man has grey hair," Mrs. Lorraine said, still with some unnecessary fervour, "he does not know that there are things much more valuable than money. You wouldn't touch that money just now; and all the thinking and reasoning in the world will never get you to touch it."

"What am I to do with it?" he said, meekly.

"Give it to Mr. Mackenzie, in trust for his daughter," Mrs. Lorraine said promptly; and then, seeing that her mother had gone to the end of the drawing-room, to fetch something or other, she added quickly: "I should be more sorry than I can tell you to find you accepting this money. You do not wish to have it. You do not need it. And if you did take it, it would prove a source of continual embarrassment and regret to you; and no assurances on the part of Mr. Mackenzie would be able to convince you that you had acted rightly by his daughter. Now, if you simply hand over your responsibilities to him, he cannot refuse them, for the sake of his own child, and you are left with the sense of having acted nobly and generously. I hope there are many men who would do what I ask you to

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"Oh, most certainly," Mrs. Lorraine said.

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"And during that time you would be alone," Mrs. Lorraine said.

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"Oh, most delightful," she exclaimed. "You know,

we should go round by Switzerland, and go up by Lucerne and Zurich to the end of the Lake of Constance——Bregenz, Mamma, isn't that the place where we hired that good-natured man the year before last?"

"Yes, child."

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To be so phlegmatic and matter-of-fact a person, Mr. Ingram was sorely disturbed on going home that evening, nor did he sleep much during the night. For the more that he speculated on all the possibilities that might arise from his meeting those people in the Tyrol, the more pertinaciously did this refrain follow these excursive fancies—"*If I go to the Tyrol, I shall fall in love with that girl and ask her to marry me. And if I do so, what position should I hold with regard to her, as a penniless man with a rich wife?*"

He did not look at the question in such a light as the opinion of the world might throw on it. The difficulty was what she herself might afterwards come to think of their mutual relations. True it was that no one could be more gentle and submissive to him than she appeared to be. In matters of opinion and discussion he already ruled with an autocratic authority which he fully perceived himself, and exercised, too, with some sort of notion that it was good for this clear-headed young woman to have to submit to control. But of what avail would this moral authority be as against the consciousness she would have that it was her fortune that was supplying both with the means of living?

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"You have expected it?" he repeated, with a stare.

"Yes," she said, quietly.

"Then you fancy you know——" he said, or rather stammered, in great embarrassment, when she interrupted him by saying—

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Then she rose and took both his hands, and looked frankly into his face.

"—And I do hope most sincerely you will be happy, my dear friend."

Ingram was fairly taken aback at the consequences

of his own imprudence. He had never dreamed for a moment that anyone would have suspected such a thing; and he had thrown out the suggestion to Sheila almost as a jest, believing, of course, that it compromised no one. And here—before he had spoken a word to Mrs. Lorraine on the subject—he was being congratulated on his approaching marriage.

"Oh, Sheila," he said, "this is all a mistake. It was a joke of mine—if I had known you would think of Mrs. Lorraine, I should not have said a word about it——"

"But it is Mrs. Lorraine?" Sheila said.

"Well, but I have never mentioned such a thing to her—never hinted it in the remotest manner. I dare say if I had, she might laugh the matter aside as too absurd."

"She will not do that," Sheila said; "if you ask her to marry you, she will marry you. I am sure of that from what I have heard, and she would be very foolish if she was not proud and glad to do that. And you—what doubt can you have, after all that you have been saying of late?"

"But you don't marry a woman merely because you admire her cleverness and kindness," he said; and then he added suddenly, "Sheila, would you do me a great favour? Mrs. Lorraine and her mother are leaving for the continent to-night. They dine at five; and I am commissioned to ask you and your papa if you would go up with me and have some dinner with them, you know, before they start. Won't you do that, Sheila?"

The girl shook her head, without answering. She had not gone to any friend's house since her husband had left London; and that house above all others was calculated to awaken in her bitter recollections.

"Won't you, Sheila?" he said. "You used to go there. I know they like you very much. I have seen you very well pleased and comfortable there, and I thought you were enjoying yourself."

"Yes, that is true," she said; and then she looked up, with a strange sort of smile on her lips, "but *'what made the assembly shine?'*"

That forced smile did not last long: the girl suddenly burst into tears, and rose, and went away to the window. Mackenzie came into the room; he did not see his daughter was crying.

"Well, Mr. Ingram, and are you coming with us to Lewis? We cannot always be staying in London, for there will be many things wanting the looking after in Borva, as you will know ferry well. And yet Sheila she will not go back; and Mairi, too, she will be forgetting the ferry sight of her own people; but if you wass coming with us, Mr. Ingram, Sheila she would come too, and it would be ferry good for her whatever."

"I have brought you another proposal. Will you take Sheila to see the Tyrol, and I will go with you?"

"The Tyrol?" said Mr. Mackenzie. "Ay, it is a ferry long way away, but if Sheila will care to go to the Tyrol—oh, yes! I will go to the Tyrol, or anywhere if she will go out of London, for it is not good for a young girl to be always in the one house, and no company, and no variety; and I wass saying to Sheila what good will she do sitting by the window, and thinking over things, and crying sometimes—by Kott, it is a foolish thing for a young girl, and I will hef no more of it!"

In other circumstances Ingram would have laughed

at this dreadful threat. Despite the frown on the old man's face, the sudden stamp of his foot, and the vehemence of his words, Ingram knew that if Sheila had turned round and said that she wished to be shut up in a dark room for the rest of her life, the old King of Borva would have said, "Ferry well, Sheila," in the meekest way, and would have been satisfied if only he could share her imprisonment with her.

"But first of all, Mr. Mackenzie, I have another proposal to make to you," Ingram said; and then he urged upon Sheila's father to accept Mrs. Lorraine's invitation. Mr. Mackenzie was nothing loth; Sheila was living by far too monotonous a life. He went over to the window to her and said—

"Sheila, my lass, you wass going nowhere else this evening; and it would be ferry convenient to go with Mr. Ingram, and he would see his friends away, and we could go to a theatre then. And it is no new thing for you to go to fine houses, and see other people; but it is new to me, and you wass saying what a beautiful house it wass many a time, and I hef wished to see it. And the people they are ferry kind, Sheila, to send me an invitation, and if they wass to come to the Lewis, what would you think if you asked them to come to your house, and they paid no heed to it? Now, it is after four, Sheila, and if you wass to get ready now——"

"Yes, I will go and get ready, papa," she said.

Ingram had a vague consciousness that he was taking Sheila up to introduce to her Mrs. Lorraine in a new character. Would Sheila look at the woman she used to fear and dislike in a wholly different fashion, and be prepared to adorn her with all the

graces which he had so often described to her? Ingram hoped that Sheila would get to like Mrs. Lorraine; and that by-and-by a better acquaintance between them might lead to a warm and friendly intimacy. Somehow he felt that if Sheila would betray such a liking—if she would come to him and say honestly that she was rejoiced he meant to marry—all his doubts would be cleared away. Sheila had already said pretty nearly as much as that; but then it followed what she understood to be an announcement of his approaching marriage, and, of course, the girl's kindly nature at once suggested a few pretty speeches. Sheila now knew that nothing was settled; after looking at Mrs. Lorraine in the light of these new possibilities, would she come to him and council him to go on and challenge a decision?

Mr. Mackenzie received with a grave dignity and politeness the more than friendly welcome given him both by Mrs. Kavanagh and her daughter; and, in view of their approaching tour, he gave them to understand that he had himself established somewhat familiar relations with foreign countries by reason of his meeting with the ships and sailors hailing from these distant shores. He displayed a profound knowledge of the habits and customs, and of the natural products, of many remote lands, which were much further afield than a little bit of inland Germany. He represented the island of Borva, indeed, as a sort of lighthouse from which you could survey pretty nearly all the countries of the globe; and broadly hinted that, so far from insular prejudice being the fruit of living in such a place, a general intercourse with diverse peoples tended to widen the understanding and throw light on the various social experiments that had been

made by the lawgivers, the philanthropists, the philosophers of the world.

It seemed to Sheila, as she sat and listened, that the pale, calm, and clear-eyed young lady opposite her was not quite so self-possessed as usual. She seemed shy, and a little self-conscious. Did she suspect that she was being observed, Sheila wondered; and the reason? When dinner was announced she took Sheila's arm, and allowed Mr. Ingram to follow them, protesting, into the other room; but there was much more of embarrassment and timidity than of an audacious mischief in her look. She was very kind indeed to Sheila; but she had wholly abandoned that air of maternal patronage which she used to assume towards the girl. She seemed to wish to be more friendly and confidential with her; and, indeed, scarcely spoke a word to Ingram during dinner, so persistently did she talk to Sheila, who sat next her.

Ingram got vexed.

"Mrs. Lorraine," he said, "you seem to forget that this is a solemn occasion. You ask us to a farewell banquet; but instead of observing the proper ceremonies, you pass the time in talking about fancy-work, and music, and other ordinary every-day trifles."

"What are the ceremonies?" she said.

"Well," he answered, "you need not occupy the time with crochet——"

"Mrs. Lavender and I are very well pleased to talk about trifles."

"But I am not," he said, bluntly, "and I am not going to be shut out by a conspiracy. Come, let us talk about your journey."

"Will my lord give his commands as to the point at which we shall start the conversation."

"You may skip the Channel."

"I wish I could," she remarked with a sigh.

"We shall land you in Paris. How are we to know that you have arrived safely?"

She looked embarrassed for a moment, and then said—

"If it is of any consequence for you to know, I shall be writing in any case to Mrs. Lavender, about some little private matter."

Ingram did not receive this promise with any great show of delight.

"You see," he said, somewhat glumly, "if I am to meet you anywhere, I should like to know the various stages of your route, so that I could guard against our missing each other."

"You have decided to go then?"

Ingram, not looking at her, but looking at Sheila, said "Yes!" and Sheila, despite all her efforts, could not help glancing up with a brief smile and blush of pleasure that were quite visible to everybody. Mrs. Lorraine struck in, with a sort of nervous haste,—

"Oh, that will be very pleasant for mamma; for she gets rather tired of me at times when we are travelling. Two women who always read the same sort of books, and have the same opinions about the people they meet, and have precisely the same tastes in everything, are not very amusing companions for each other. You want a little discussion thrown in——"

"And if we meet Mr. Ingram we are sure to have that," Mrs. Kavanagh said, benignly.

"And you want somebody to give you new opinions, and put things differently, you know. I am sure mamma will be most kind to you, if you can make it convenient to spend a few days with us, Mr. Ingram."

"And I have been trying to persuade Mr. Mackenzie and this young lady to come also," said Ingram.

"Oh, that would be delightful!" Mrs. Lorraine cried, suddenly taking Sheila's hand. "You will come, won't you? We should have such a pleasant party. I am sure your papa would be most interested; and we are not tied to any route—we should go wherever you pleased."

She would have gone on beseeching and advising, but she saw something in Sheila's face which told her that all her efforts would be unavailing.

"It is very kind of you," Sheila said, "but I do not think I can go to the Tyrol."

"Then you will go back to the Lewis, Sheila," her father said.

"I cannot go back to the Lewis, papa," she said, simply; and at this point Ingram, perceiving how painful the discussion was for the girl, suddenly called attention to the hour, and asked Mrs. Kavanagh if all her portmanteaus were strapped up.

They drove in a body down to the station; and Mr. Ingram was most assiduous in supplying the two travellers with an abundance of everything they could not possibly want. He got them a reading-lamp, though both of them declared they never read in a train. He got them some eau-de-cologne, though they had plenty in their travelling-case. He purchased for them an amount of miscellaneous literature that would have been of benefit to a hospital—provided that the patients were strong enough to bear it. And then bade them good-bye at least half-a-dozen times as the train was slowly moving out of the station, and made the most solemn vows about meeting them at Bregenz.

"Now, Sheila," he said, "shall we go to a theatre?"

"I do not care to go unless you wish," was the answer.

"She does not care to go anywhere now," her father said; and then the girl, seeing that he was rather distressed about her apparent want of interest, pulled herself together and said, cheerfully—

"Is it not too late to go to a theatre? And I am sure we could be very comfortable at home. Mairi, she will think it very unkind if we go to the theatre by ourselves."

"Mairi!" said her father, impatiently, for he never lost an opportunity of indirectly justifying Lavender. "Mairi has more sense than you, Sheila, and she knows that a servant-lass has to stay at home, and she knows that she is ferry different from you, and she is a ferry good girl whatever, and hass no pride, and she does not expect nonsense in going about and such things."

"I am quite sure, papa, you would rather go home and sit down and have a talk with Mr. Ingram, and a pipe, and a little whisky, than go to any theatre."

"What I would do! And what I would like!" said her father, in a vexed way. "Sheila you have no more sense as a lass that wass still at the school. I want you to go to the theatre, and amuse yourself, instead of sitting in the house, and thinking, thinking, thinking. And all for what?"

"But if one has something to be sorry for, is it not better to think of it?"

"And what hef *you* to be sorry for?" said her father, in amazement, and forgetting that, in his diplomatic fashion, he had been accustoming Sheila to the notion that she, too, might have erred grievously and been in part responsible for all that had occurred.

"I have a great deal to be sorry for, papa," she

said; and then she renewed her entreaties that her two companions should abandon their notion of going to a theatre, and resolved to spend the rest of the evening in what she consented to call her home.

After all they formed a comfortable little company when they sat round the fire, which had been lit for cheerfulness rather than for warmth; and Ingram, at least, was in a particularly pleasant mood. For Sheila had seized the opportunity, when her father had gone out of the room for a few minutes, to say, suddenly—

"Oh, my dear friend, if you care for her, you have a great happiness before you."

"Why, Sheila?" he said, staring.

"She cares for you more than you can think—I saw it to-night in everything she said and did."

"I thought she was just a trifle saucy, do you know. She shunted me out of the conversation altogether."

Sheila shook her head and smiled.

"She was embarrassed. She suspects that you like her, and that I know it, and that I came to see her. If you ask her to marry you, she will do it gladly."

"Sheila," Ingram said, with a severity that was not in his heart, "you must not say such things. You might make fearful mischief by putting these wild notions into people's heads."

"They are not wild notions," she said, quietly. "A woman can tell what another woman is thinking about better than a man."

"And am I to go to the Tyrol and ask her to marry me?" he said, with the air of a meek scholar.

"I should like to see you married—very, very much indeed," Sheila said.

"And to her?"

"Yes, to her," the girl said, frankly. "For I am

sure she has a great regard for you, and she is clever enough to put value on—on—but I cannot flatter you, Mr. Ingram."

"Shall I send you word about what happens in the Tyrol?" he said, still with the humble air of one receiving instructions.

"Yes."

"And if she rejects me, what shall I do?"

"She will not reject you."

"Shall I come to you for consolation, and ask you what you meant by driving me on such a blunder?"

"If she rejects you," Sheila said, with a smile, "it will be your own fault, and you will deserve it. For you are a little too harsh with her, and you have too much authority, and I am surprised that she will be so amiable under it. Because, you know, a woman expects to be treated with much gentleness and deference before she has said she will marry—she likes to be entreated, and coaxed, and made much of; but instead of that, you are very overbearing with Mrs. Lorraine."

"I did not mean to be, Sheila," he said, honestly enough. "If anything of the kind happened, it must have been in a joke."

"Oh no, not a joke," Sheila said; "and I have noticed it before—the very first evening you came to their house. And perhaps you did not know of it yourself; and then Mrs. Lorraine, she is clever enough to see that you did not mean to be disrespectful. But she will expect you to alter that a great deal if you ask her to marry you—that is, until you are married."

"Have I ever been overbearing to you, Sheila?" he asked.

"To me? Oh, no. You have always been very gentle to me; but I know how that is. When you first

knew me, I was almost a child, and you treated me like a child; and ever since then it has always been the same. But to others—yes, you are too unceremonious; and Mrs. Lorraine will expect you to be much more mild and amiable, and you must let her have opinions of her own——"

"Sheila, you give me to understand that I am a bear," he said, in tones of injured protest.

Sheila laughed.

"Have I told you the truth at last? It was no matter as long as you had ordinary acquaintances to deal with. But now, if you wish to marry that pretty lady, you must be much more gentle if you are discussing anything with her; and if she says anything that is not very wise, you must not say bluntly that it is foolish, but you must smooth it away, and put her right gently, and then she will be grateful to you. But if you say to her, 'Oh, that is nonsense,' as you might say to a man, you will hurt her very much. The man would not care; he would think you were stupid to have a different opinion from him; but a woman fears she is not as clever as the man she is talking to, and likes his good opinion; and if he says something careless like that, she is sensitive to it, and it wounds her. To-night you contradicted Mrs. Lorraine about the *h* in those Italian words; and I am quite sure you were wrong. She knows Italian much better than you do; and yet she yielded to you very prettily."

"Go on, Sheila; go on," he said, with a resigned air. "What else did I do?"

"Oh, a great many rude things. You should not have contradicted Mrs. Kavanagh about the colour of an amethyst!"

"But why? You know she was wrong; and she

said herself a minute afterwards that she was thinking of a sapphire."

"But you ought not to contradict a person older than yourself," said Sheila, sententiously.

"Goodness gracious me! Because one person is born in one year, and one in another, is that any reason why you should say that an amethyst is blue? Mr. Mackenzie, come and talk to this girl. She is trying to pervert my principles. She says that in talking to a woman you have to abandon all hope of being accurate, and that respect for the truth is not to be thought of. Because a woman has a pretty face she is to be allowed to say that black is white, and white pea-green. And if you say anything to the contrary, you are a brute, and had better go and bellow by yourself in a wilderness."

"Sheila is quite right," said old Mackenzie, at a venture.

"Oh, do you think so?" Ingram asked, coolly. "Then I can understand how her moral sentiment has been destroyed; and it is easy to see where she has got a set of opinions that strike at the very roots of a respectable and decent society."

"Do you know," said Sheila, seriously, "that it is very rude of you to say so, even in jest? If you treat Mrs. Lorraine in this way——"

She suddenly stopped. Her father had not heard, being busy among his pipes. So the subject was discreetly dropped, Ingram reluctantly promising to pay some attention to Sheila's precepts of politeness.

Altogether, it was a pleasant evening they had; but when Ingram had left, Mr. Mackenzie said to his daughter—

"Now, look at this, Sheila. When Mr. Ingram goes

away from London, you hef no friend at all then in the place, and you are quite alone. Why will you not come to the Lewis, Sheila? It is no one there will know anything of what has happened here; and Mairi she is a good girl, and she will hold her tongue."

"They will ask me why I come back without my husband," Sheila said, looking down.

"Oh, you will leave that all to me," said her father, who knew he had surely sufficient skill to thwart the curiosity of a few simple creatures in Borva. "There is many a girl hass to go home for a time, while her husband he is away on his business; and there will no one hef the right to ask you any more than I will tell them, and I will tell them what they should know—oh, yes, I will tell them ferry well, and you will hef no trouble about it. And Sheila, you are a good lass, and you know that I hef many things to attend to that is not easy to write about——"

"I do know that, Papa," the girl said, "and many a time have I wished you would go back to the Lewis."

"And leave you here by yourself? Why, you are talking foolishly, Sheila. But now, Sheila, you will see how you could go back with me, and it would be a ferry different thing for you running about in the fresh air than shut up in a room in the middle of a town. And you are not looking ferry well, my lass, and Scarlett she will hef to take the charge of you."

"I will go to the Lewis with you, Papa, when you please," she said; and he was glad and proud to hear her decision; but there was no happy light of anticipation in her eyes, such as ought to have been awakened by this projected journey to the far island which she had known as her home.

And so it was, that one rough and blustering after-

noon the *Clansman* steamed into Stornoway harbour; and Sheila, casting timid and furtive glances towards the quay, saw Duncan standing there, with the waggonette some little distance back, under charge of a boy. Duncan was a proud man that day. He was the first to shove the gangway on to the vessel, and he was the first to get on board; and in another minute Sheila found the tall, keen-eyed, brown-faced keeper before her, and he was talking in a rapid and eager fashion, throwing in an occasional scrap of Gaelic in the mere hurry of his words.

"Oh yes, Miss Sheila, Scarlett she is ferry well whatever, but there is nothing will make her so well as your coming back to sa Lewis, and we wass saying yesterday that it looked as if it wass more as three or four years, or six years, since you went away from sa Lewis, but now it iss no time at all, for you are just the same Miss Sheila as we knew before; and there is not one in all Borva but will think it iss a good day this day that you will come back——"

"Duncan!" said Mackenzie, with an impatient stamp of his foot, "why will you talk like a foolish man? Get the luggage to the shore, instead of keeping us all the day in the boat."

"Oh, ferry well, Mr. Mackenzie," said Duncan, departing with an injured air, and grumbling as he went; "it iss no new thing to you to see Miss Sheila, and you will have no thocht for anyone but yourself. But I will get out the luggage—oh, yes; I will get out the luggage."

Sheila, in truth, had but little luggage with her; but she remained on board the boat until Duncan was quite ready to start, for she did not wish just then to meet any of her friends in Stornoway. Then she stepped ashore, and crossed the quay, and got into

the waggonette; and the two horses, whom she had caressed for a moment, seemed to know that they were carrying Sheila back to her own country, from the speed with which they rattled out of the town, and away into the lonely moorland.

Mackenzie let them have their way. Past the solitary lakes they went, past the long stretches of undulating morass, past the lonely sheilings perched far up on the hills; and the rough and blustering wind blew about them, and the grey clouds hurried by, and the old, strong-bearded man who shook the reins and gave the horses their heads, could have laughed aloud in his joy that he was driving his daughter home. But Sheila—she sat there as one dead; and Mairi, timidly regarding her, wondered what the impassible face and the bewildered, sad eyes meant. Did she not smell the sweet strong scent of the heather? Had she no interest in the great birds that were circling in the air over by the Barbhas mountains? Where was the pleasure she used to exhibit in remembering the curious names of the small lakes they passed?

And lo! the rough grey day broke asunder, and a great blaze of fire appeared in the west, shining across the moors and touching the blue slopes of the distant hills. Sheila was getting near to the region of beautiful sunsets and lambent twilights, and the constant movement and mystery of the sea. Overhead the heavy clouds were still hurried on by the wind; and in the south the eastern slopes of the hills and the moors were getting to be of a soft purple; but all along the west, where her home was, lay a great flush of gold, and she knew that Loch Roag was shining there, and the gable of the house at Borvabost getting warm in the beautiful light.

"It is a good afternoon you will be getting to see lorva again," her father said to her; but all the answer she made was to ask her father not to stop at arra-na-hina, but to drive straight on to Callernish. She ould visit the people at Garra-na-hina some other day.

The boat was waiting for them at Callernish, and ıe boat was the *Maighdean-mhara.*

"How pretty she is! How have you kept her so ell, Duncan?" said Sheila, her face lighting up for the rst time, as she went down the path to the bright-painted ttle vessel that scarcely rocked in the water below.

"Bekass we neffer knew but that it was this week, r the week before, or the next week you would come ack, Miss Sheila, and you would want your boat; but wass Mr. Mackenzie himself, it wass he that did all ıe pentin of the boat, and it iss as well done as Mr. IcNicol could have done it, and a great deal better ıan that mirover."

"Won't you steer her yourself, Sheila?" her father ıggested, glad to see that she was at last being inrested and pleased.

"Oh, yes; I will steer her, if I have not forgotten ll the points that Duncan taught me."

"And I am sure you hef not done that, Miss heila," Duncan said; "for there wass no one knew och Roag better as you, not one, and you hef not een so long away; and when you tek the tiller in your and, it will all come back to you just as if you wass oing away from Borva the day before yesterday."

She certainly had not forgotten; and she was proud nd pleased to see how well the shapely little craft erformed its duties. They had a favourable wind, nd ran rapidly along the opening channels, until, in ue course, they glided into the well-known bay over

which, and shining in the yellow light from the sunset, they saw Sheila's house.

She had escaped so far the trouble of meeting friends; but she could not escape her friends in Borvabost. They had waited for her for hours, not knowing when the *Clansman* might arrive at Stornoway; and now they crowded down to the shore, and there was a great shaking of hands, and an occasional sob from some old crone, and a thousand repetitions of the familiar "And are you ferry well, Miss Sheila?" from small children who had come across from the village in defiance of mothers and fathers. And Sheila's face brightened into a wonderful gladness, and she had a hundred questions to ask for one answer she got, and she did not know what to do with the number of small brown fists that wanted to shake hands with her.

"Will you let Miss Sheila alone?" Duncan called out, adding something in Gaelic which came strangely from a man who sometimes reproved his own master for swearing. "Get away with you, you brats; it wass better you would be in your beds than bothering people that wass come all the way from Styornoway."

Then they all went up in a body to the house; and Scarlett, who had neither eyes, ears, nor hands but for the young girl who had been the very pride of her heart, was nigh driven to distraction by Mackenzie's stormy demands for oatcake, and glasses, and whisky. Scarlett angrily remonstrated with her husband for allowing this rabble of people to interfere with the comfort of Miss Sheila; and Duncan, taking her reproaches with great good-humour, contented himself with doing her work, and went and got the cheese, and the plates, and the whisky, while Scarlett, with a hundred endear-

ing phrases, was helping Sheila to take off her travelling things. And Sheila, it turned out, had brought with her in her portmanteau certain huge and wonderful cakes, not of oatmeal, from Glasgow; and these were soon on the great table in the kitchen, and Sheila herself distributing pieces to those small folks who were so awe-stricken by the sight of this strange dainty, that they forgot her injunctions and thanked her timidly in Gaelic.

"Well, Sheila, my lass," said her father to her, as they stood at the door of the house and watched the troop of their friends, children and all, go over the hill to Borvabost, in the red light of the sunset, "and are you glad to be home again?"

"Oh, yes," she said, heartily enough; and Mackenzie thought that things were going on favourably.

"You hef no such sunsets in the South, Sheila," he observed, loftily casting his eye around, although he did not usually pay much attention to the picturesqueness of his native island; "now look at the light there iss on Suainabhal. Do you see the red on the water down there, Sheila? Oh yes, I thought you would say it was ferry beautiful—it is a ferry good colour on the water. The water looks ferry well when it is red. You hef no such things in London—not any, Sheila. Now we must go indoors; for these things you can see any day here, and we must not keep our friends waiting."

An ordinary, dull-witted, or careless man might have been glad to have a little quiet after so long and tedious a journey; but Mr. Mackenzie was no such person. He had resolved to guard against Sheila's first evening at home being in any way languid or monotonous; and so he had asked one or two of his especial friends to remain and have supper with them.

Moreover, he did not wish the girl to spend the rest of the evening out-of-doors, when the melancholy time of the twilight drew over the hills, and the sea began to sound remote and sad. Sheila should have a comfortable evening indoors; and he would himself, after supper, when the small parlour was well lit up, sing for her one or two songs, just to keep the thing going, as it were. He would let nobody else sing. These Gaelic songs were not the sort of music to make people cheerful. And if Sheila herself would sing for them!

And Sheila did. And her father chose the songs for her, and they were the blithest he could find, and the girl seemed really in excellent spirits. They had their pipes and their hot whisky and water in this little parlour; Mr. Mackenzie explaining that although his daughter was accustomed to spacious and gilded drawing-rooms where such a thing was impossible, she would do anything to make her friends welcome and comfortable, and they might fill their glasses and their pipes with impunity. And Sheila sang again and again, all cheerful and sensible English songs; and she listened to the odd jokes and stories her friends had to tell her; and Mackenzie was delighted with the success of his plans and precautions. Was not her very appearance now a triumph? She was laughing, smiling, talking to everyone; he had not seen her so happy for many a day.

In the midst of it all, when the night had come on apace, what was this wild skirl outside that made everybody start? Mackenzie jumped to his feet, with an angry vow in his heart, that if this "teffle of a piper John" should come down the hill playing "Lochaber no more" or "Cha till mi tuilich," or any other mournful tune, he would have his chanter broken

in a thousand splinters over his head. But what was the wild air that came nearer and nearer, until John marched into the house, and came, with ribbons and pipes, to the very door of the room which was flung open to him? Not a very appropriate air, perhaps, for it was—

"The Campbells are coming, oho! oho!
The Campbells are coming, oho! oho!
The Campbells are coming to bonny Lochleven!
The Campbells are coming, oho! oho!"

but it was, to Mr. Mackenzie's rare delight, a right good joyous tune, and it was meant as a welcome to Sheila, and forthwith he caught the white-haired piper by the shoulder, and dragged him in, and said—

"Put down your pipes and come into the house, John! Put down your pipes, and tek off your bonnet, and we shall hef a good dram together this night, by Kott! And it is Sheila herself will pour out the whisky for you, John; and she is a good Highland girl, and she knows the piper was never born that could be hurt by whisky, and the whisky was neffer yet made that could hurt a piper. What do you say to that, John?"

John did not answer; he was standing before Sheila, with his bonnet in his hand, but with his pipes still proudly over his shoulder. And he took the glass from her, and called out "Shlainte!" and drained every drop of it out to welcome Mackenzie's daughter home.

CHAPTER XI.

The Voyage of the "Phœbe."

It was a cold morning in January, and up here among the Jura hills the clouds had melted into a small and chilling rain that fell ceaselessly. The great "Paps of Jura" were hidden in the mist; even the valleys near at hand were vague and dismal in the

pale fog; and the Sound of Islay, lying below, and the far sea beyond, were gradually growing undistinguishable. In a rude little sheiling, built on one of the plateaus of rock, Frank Lavender sat alone, listening to the plashing of the rain without. A rifle that he had just carefully dried lay across his knees. A brace of deerhounds had stretched out their paws on the earthen floor, and had put their long noses between their paws to produce a little warmth. It was, indeed, a cold and damp morning; and the little hut was pervaded with a smell of wet wood, and also of peat-ashes, for one of the gillies had tried to light a fire, but the peats had gone out.

It was Lavender who had let the fire go out. He had forgotten it. He was thinking of other things—of a song, mostly, that Sheila used to sing; and lines of it went hither and thither through his brain, as he recalled the sound of her voice:—

"Haste to thy barque,
Coastwise steer not;
Sail wide of Mull,
Jura near not!

"Farewell, she said,
Her last pang subduing,
Brave Mac Intyre,
Costly thy wooing!"

There came into the sheiling a little wiry old keeper, with shaggy grey hair and keen black eyes.

"Cosh bless me!" he said, petulantly, as he wrung the rain out of his bonnet, "you hef let the peats go out, Mr. Lavender, and who will tell when the rain will go off?"

"It can't last long, Neil. It came on too suddenly for that. I thought we were going to get one fine day when we started this morning; but you don't often manage that here, Neil."

"Indeed no, sir," said Neil, who was not a native of Jura, and was as eager as anyone to abuse the weather prevailing there; "it is a ferry bad place for the weather. If the Almichty were to tek the sun away a' tagether, it would be days and weeks and days before you would find it oot. But it iss a good thing, sir, you will get the one stag before the mist came down; and he is not a stag, mirover, but a fine big hart, and a royal, too, and I hef not seen many finer in the Jura hills. Oh yes, sir, when he was crossing the burn, I made out his points ferry well, and I wass saying to myself, 'Now, if Mr. Lavender will get this one, it will be a grand day this day, and it will make up for many a wet day among the hills.'"

"They haven't come back with the pony yet?" Lavender asked, laying down his gun and going to the door of the hut.

"Oh no," Neil said, following him, "it iss a long way to get the powny, and maybe they will stop at Mr. MacDougall's to hef a dram. And Mr. MacDougall was saying to me yesterday that the ferry next time you wass shoot a royal, he would have the horns dressed and the head stuffed to make you a present, for he is ferry proud of the picture of Miss Margaret, and he will say to me many's sa time that I wass to gif you the ferry best shooting, and not to be afraid of disturbing sa deer, when you had a mind to go out. And I am not sure, sir, we will not get another stag to tek down with us yet, if the wind would carry away the mist, for the rain that is nearly off now, and as you are very wet, sir, already, it is no matter if we go down through the glen and cross the water to get the side of Ben Bheulah."

"That is true enough, Neil; and I fancy the clouds

are beginning to lift. And there they come with the pony."

Neil directed his glass towards a small group that appeared to be coming up the side of the valley below them, and that was still at some considerable distance.

"Cosh bless me!" he cried, "what is that? There iss two strangers—oh yes, indeed, and mirover and there is one of them on the pony."

Lavender's heart leaped within him. If they were strangers, they were coming to see him; and how long was it since he had seen the face of any one of his old friends and companions? It seemed to him years.

"Is it a man or a woman on the pony, Neil?" he asked, hurriedly, with some wild fancy flashing through his brain. "Give me the glass!"

"Oh, it is a man," said Neil, handing over the glass. "What would a woman be doing up sa hills on a morning like this?"

The small party below came up out of the grey mist; and Lavender in the distance heard a long view-halloo.

"Cott tam them!" said Neil, at a venture. "There is not a deer on Benan Cabrach that will not hear them!"

"But if these strangers are coming to see me, I fear we must leave the deer alone, Neil."

"Ferry well, sir, ferry well, sir, it is a bad day whatever; and it is not many strangers will come to Jura. I suppose they hef come to Port Ascaig, and taken the ferry across the Sound."

"I am going to meet them on chance," Lavender said, and he set off along the side of the deep valley, leaving Neil with the dogs and the rifles.

"Hillo, Johnny!" he cried, in amazement, when he came upon the advancing group. "And you, Mosenberg! By Jove, how did you ever get here?"

There was an abundance of hand-shaking and incoherent questions when young Mosenberg jumped down on the wet heather, and the three friends had actually met. Lavender scarcely knew what to say: these two faces were so strange, and yet so familiar; their appearance there was so unexpected, his pleasure so great.

"I can't believe my eyes yet, Johnny. Why did you bring him here? Don't you know what you'll have to put up with in this place. Well, this does do a fellow's heart good. I am awfully pleased to see you, and it is very kind of you——"

"But I am very cold," the handsome Jew-boy said, swinging his arms and stamping his feet. "Wet boots, wet carts, wet roads, wet saddles, and everywhere cold, cold, cold——"

"And he won't drink whisky, so what is he to expect?" Johnny Eyre said.

"Come along up to a little hut here," Lavender said, "and we'll try to get a fire lit. And I have some brandy there——"

"And you have plenty of water to mix with it," said the boy, looking mournfully around. "Very good. Let us have the fire and the warm drink; and then, you know the story of the music that was frozen in the trumpet, and that all came out when it was thawed at a fire? When we get warm we have very great news to tell you—oh, very great news indeed."

"I don't want any news—I want your company. Come along, like good fellows, and leave the news for afterwards. The men are going on with a pony to fetch a stag that has been shot—they won't be back for an hour, I suppose, at the soonest. This is the sheiling up here, where the brandy is secreted. Now, Neil, help us to get up a blaze. If any of you have

newspapers, letters, or anything that will set a few sticks on fire——"

"I have a box of wax matches," Johnny said, "and I know how to light a peat-fire better than any man in the country."

He was not very successful at first, for the peats were a trifle damp; but in the end he conquered, and a very fair blaze was produced, although the smoke that filled the sheiling had nearly blinded Mosenberg's eyes. Then Lavender produced a small tin pot and a solitary tumbler; and they boiled some water, and lit their pipes, and made themselves seats of peat round the fire. All the while a brisk conversation was going on, some portions of which astonished Lavender considerably.

For months back, indeed, he had almost cut himself off from the civilized world. His address was known to one or two persons; and sometimes they sent him a letter; but he was a bad correspondent. The news of his aunt's death did not reach him till a fortnight after the funeral; and then it was by a singular chance that he noticed it in the columns of an old newspaper.

"That is the only thing I regret about coming away," he was saying to these two friends of his; "I should like to have seen the old woman before she died. She was very kind to me."

"Well," said Johnny Eyre, with a shake of the head, "that is all very well; but a mere outsider like myself—you see it looks to me a little unnatural that she should go and leave her money to a mere friend, and not to her own relations——"

"I am very glad she did," Lavender said. "I had as good as asked her to do it long before. And Ted Ingram will make a better use of it than I ever did."

"It is all very well for you to say so now, after all this fuss about those two pictures; but suppose she had left you to starve?"

"Never mind suppositions," Lavender said, to get rid of the subject. "Tell me, Mosenberg, how is that overture of yours getting on?"

"It is nearly finished," said the lad, with a flush of pleasure, "and I have shown it in rough to two or three good friends, and—shall I tell you?—it may be performed at the Crystal Palace. But that is a chance. And the fate of it, that is also a chance. But you—you have succeeded all at once, and brilliantly, and all the world is talking of you; and yet you go away among mountains, and live in the cold and wet, and you might as well be dead."

"What an ungrateful boy it is!" Lavender cried. "Here you have a comfortable fire, and hot brandy-and-water, and biscuits, and cigars if you wish; and you talk about people wishing to leave these things and die! Don't you know that in half-an-hour's time you will see that pony come back with a deer—a royal hart—slung across it; and won't you be proud when MacDougall takes you out and gives you a chance of driving home such a prize? Then you will carry the horns back to London, and you will have them put up, and you will discourse to your friends of the span, and the pearls of the antlers, and the crockets? To-night after supper you will see the horns and the head brought into the room, and if you fancy that you yourself shot the stag, you will see that this life among the hills has its compensations."

"It is a very cold life," the lad said, passing his hands over the fire.

"That is because you won't drink anything," said

Johnny Eyre, against whom no such charge could be brought. "And don't you know that the drinking of whisky is a provision invented by nature to guard human beings like you and me from cold and wet? You are flying in the face of Providence if you don't drink whisky among the Scotch hills."

"And have you people to talk to?" said Mosenberg, looking at Lavender with a vague wonder, for he could not understand why any man should choose such a life.

"Not many."

"What do you do on the long evenings when you are by yourself?"

"Well it isn't very cheerful; but it does a man good service sometimes to be alone for a time; it lets him find himself out."

"You ought to be up in London, to have all the praise of the people about your two pictures. Everyone is talking of them; the newspapers, too—have you seen the newspapers?"

"One or two. But all I know of these two pictures is derived from offers forwarded me by the Secretary at the Exhibition Rooms. I was surprised when I got them at first. But never mind them. Tell me more about the people one used to know. What about Ingram now? Has he cut the Board of Trade? Does he drive in the Park? Is he still in his rooms in Sloane Street?"

"Then you have had no letters from him?" Mosenberg said, with some surprise.

"No. Probably he does not know where I am. In any case——"

"But he is going to be married!" Mosenberg cried. "You did not know that? And to Mrs. Lorraine!"

"You don't say so! Why, he used to hate her—but that was before he knew her. To Mrs. Lorraine?"

"Yes. And it is amusing. She is so proud of him. And if he speaks at the table, she will turn away from you, as if you were not worth listening to, and have all her attention for him. And whatever is his opinion, she will defend that, and you must not disagree with her—oh, it is very amusing!" And the lad laughed, and shook back his curls.

"It is an odd thing," Lavender said; "but many a time, long before Ingram ever saw Mrs. Lorraine, I used to imagine these two married. I knew she was just the sort of clever, independent, clear-headed woman, to see Ingram's strong points, and rate them at their proper value. But I never expected anything of the sort, of course; for I had always a notion that some day or other he would be led into marrying some pretty, gentle, and soft-headed young thing, whom he would have to take through life in a protecting sort of way, and who would never be a real companion for him. So he is to marry Mrs. Lorraine, after all! Well, he won't become a man of fashion, despite all his money. He is sure to start a yacht, for one thing. And they will travel a deal, I suppose. I must write and congratulate him."

"I met him on the day I went to see your picture," Mosenberg said. "Mrs. Lorraine was looking at it a long time, and at last she came back and said, 'The sea in that picture makes me feel cold.' That was a compliment, was it not? Only you cannot get a good view very often; for the people will not stand back from the pictures. But everyone asks why you did not keep these two over for the Academy."

"I shall have other two for the Academy, I hope."

"Commissions?" Johnny asked, with a practical air.

"No. I have had some offers; but I prefer to leave the thing open. But you have not told me how you got here yet," Lavender added, continually breaking away from this subject of the pictures.

"In the *Phœbe*," Eyre said.

"Is she in the bay?"

"Oh no. We had to leave her at Port Ellen to get a few small repairs done, and Mosenberg and I came on by road to Port Ascaig. Mind you, she was quite small enough to come round the Mull at this time of the year."

"I should think so. What's your crew?"

"Two men and a lad, besides Mosenberg and myself, and I can tell you we had our hands full sometimes."

"You've given up open boats with stone ballast now," Lavender said, with a laugh.

"Rather. But it was no laughing matter," Eyre added, with a sudden gravity coming over his face. "It was the narrowest squeak I ever had, and I don't know now how I clung on to that place till the day broke. When I came to myself and called out for you, I never expected to hear you answer; and in the darkness, by Jove! your voice sounded like the voice of a ghost. How you managed to drag me so far up that seaweed I can't imagine; and then the dipping down and under the boat——"

"It was that dip down that saved me," Lavender said. "It brought me to; and made me scramble like a rat up the other side as soon as I felt my hands on the rock again. It was a narrow squeak, as you say, Johnny. Do you remember how black the place looked when the first light began to show in the sky; and how we kept each other awake by calling; and

how you called 'hurrah!' when we heard Donald; and how strange it was to find ourselves so near the mouth of the harbour, after all? During the night I fancied we must have been thrown on Battie Island, you know——"

"I do not like to hear about that," young Mosenberg said. "And always, if the wind came on strong, or if the skies grew black, Eyre would tell me all the story over again when we were in this boat coming down by Arran and Cantyre. Let us go out and see if they come with the deer. Has the rain stopped?"

At this moment, indeed, sounds of the approaching party were heard, and when Lavender and his friends went to the door, the pony, with the deer slung on to him, was just coming up. It was a sufficiently picturesque sight—the rude little sheiling with its peat-fire, the brown and wiry gillies, the slain deer roped on to the pony, and all around the wild magnificence of hill and valley clothed in moving mists. The rain had, indeed, cleared off; but these pale white fogs still clung around the mountains, and rendered the valleys vague and shadowy. Lavender informed Neil that he would make no further effort that day; he gave the men a glass of whisky all round; and then, with his friends, he proceeded to make his way down to the small white cottage fronting the Sound of Islay, which had been his home for months back.

Just before setting off, however, he managed to take young Mosenberg aside for a moment.

"I suppose," he said, with his eyes cast down," I suppose you heard something from Ingram of—of Sheila?"

"Yes," said the lad, rather bashfully. "Ingram had heard from her. She was still in Lewis."

"And well?"

"I think so; yes," said Mosenberg; and then he added, with some hesitation, "I should like to speak to you about it when we have the opportunity. There were some things that Mr. Ingram said—I am sure he would like you to know them."

"There was no message to me?" Lavender asked, in a low voice.

"From her? No. But it was the opinion of Mr. Ingram——"

"Oh, never mind that, Mosenberg," said the other, turning away wearily. "I suppose you won't find it too fatiguing to walk from here back? It will warm you, you know; and the old woman down there will get you something to eat. You may make it luncheon or dinner, as you like, for it will be nearly two by the time you get down. Then you can go for a prowl round the coast; if it does not rain, I shall be working as long as there is daylight. Then we can have a dinner and supper combined in the evening. You will get venison and whisky."

"Don't you ever have anything else?"

"Oh yes. The venison will be in honour of you. I generally have mutton and whisky."

"Look here, Lavender," the lad said, with considerable confusion, "the fact is—Eyre and I—we brought you a few things in the *Phœbe*—a little wine, you know, and some such things. To-morrow, if you could get a messenger to go down to Port Ellen—but no, I suppose we must go and work the boat up the Sound."

"If you do that, I must go with you," Lavender said, "for the chances are that your skipper doesn't know the currents in the Sound, and they are rather peculiar, I can tell you. So Johnny and you have brought me some wine. I wish we had it now, to

celebrate your arrival; for I am afraid I can offer you nothing but whisky."

The old Highland woman who had charge of the odd little cottage in which Lavender lived was put into a state of violent consternation by the arrival of these two strangers; but as Lavender said he would sleep on a couple of chairs, and give his bed to Mosenberg, and the sofa to Eyre, and as Mosenberg declared that the house was a marvel of neatness and comfort, and as Johnny assured her that he had frequently slept in a herring-barrel, she grew gradually pacified. There was little difficulty about plates and knives and forks at luncheon, which consisted of cold mutton and two bottles of ale that had somehow been overlooked; but all these minor inconveniences were soon smoothed over; and then Lavender, carrying his canvas under his arm, and a portable easel over his shoulder, went down to the shore, bade his companions good-bye for a couple of hours, and left them to explore the winding and rocky coast of Jura.

In the evening they had dinner in a small parlour, which was pretty well filled with a chest of drawers, a sofa, and a series of large canvasses. There was a peat-fire burning in the grate, and two candles on the table; but the small room did not get oppressively hot, for each time the door was opened a draught of cold sea-air rushed in from the passage, sometimes blowing out one of the candles, but always sweetening the atmosphere. Then Johnny had some fine tobacco with him; and Mosenberg had brought Lavender a present of a meerschaum pipe; and presently a small kettle of hot water was put in requisition, and the friends drew round the fire.

"Well, it *is* good of you to come and see a fellow

like this," Lavender said, with a very apparent and hearty gratitude in his face; "I can scarcely believe my eyes that it is true. And can you make any stay, Johnny? Have you brought your colours with you?"

"Oh no, I don't mean to work," Johnny said. "I have always had a fancy for a mid-winter cruise. It's a hardening sort of thing, you know. You soon get used to it, don't you, Mosenberg?"

And Johnny grinned.

"Not yet—I may afterwards," said the lad. "But at present this is more comfortable than being on deck at night when it rains and you know not where you are going."

"But that was only your own perversity. You might just as well have stopped in the cabin and played that cornopean, and made yourself warm and comfortable. Really, Lavender, it's very good fun; and if you only watch for decent weather, you can go anywhere. Fancy our coming round the Mull with the *Phœbe* yesterday! And we had quite a pleasant trip across to Islay."

"And where do you propose to go after leaving Jura?" Lavender asked.

"Well, you know, the main object of our cruise was to come and see you. But if you care to come with us for a few days, we will go wherever you like."

"If you are going further north, I must go with you," Lavender said, "for you are bound to drown yourself some day, Johnny, if some one doesn't take care of you."

There was no deep design in this project of Johnny's; but he had had a vague impression that Lavender might like to go north, if only to have a passing glimpse at the island he used to know.

"One of my fellows is well acquainted with the Hebrides," he said; "if you don't think it too much of a risk, I should like it myself; for those northern islands must look uncommonly wild and savage in winter; and one likes to have new experiences. Fancy, Mosenberg, what material you will get for your next piece—it will be full of storms, and seas, and thunder—you know how the wind whistles through the overture to the *Diamants de la Couronne*——"

"It will whistle through us," said the boy, with an anticipatory shiver; "but I do not mind the wind if it is not wet. It is the wet that makes a boat so disagreeable—everything is so cold and clammy—you can touch nothing, and when you put your head up in the morning—pah! a dash of rain and mist, and salt water altogether gives you a shock——"

"What made you come round the Mull, Johnny, instead of cutting through the Crinan?" Lavender asked of his friend.

"Well," said the youth, modestly, "nothing except that two or three men said we couldn't do it."

"I thought so," Lavender said. "And I see I must go with you, Johnny. You must play no more of these tricks. You must watch your time, and run her quietly up the Sound of Jura to Crinan; and watch again and get her up to Oban; and watch again and get her up to Loch Sligachan. Then you may consider. It is quite possible you may have fine, clear weather if there is a moderate north-east wind blowing——"

"A north-east wind!" Mosenberg cried.

"Yes," Lavender replied, confidently, for he had not forgotten what Sheila used to teach him; "that is your only chance. If you have been living in fog for a fortnight, you will never forget your gratitude to a

north-easter when it suddenly sets in to lift the clouds and show you a bit of blue sky. But it may knock us about a bit in crossing the Minch."

"We have come round the Mull, and we can go anywhere," Johnny said. "I'd back the *Phœbe* to take you safely to the West Indies; wouldn't you, Mosenberg?"

"Oh no," the boy said. "I would back her to take you, not to take me."

Two or three days thereafter the *Phœbe* was brought up the Sound from Port Ellen, and such things as were meant as a present to Lavender were landed. Then the three friends embarked; for the weather had cleared considerably, and there was, indeed, when they set out, a pale, wintry sunshine gleaming on the sea, and on the white deck and spars of the handsome little cutter which Johnny commanded. The *Phœbe* was certainly a great improvement on the crank craft in which he used to adventure his life on Loch Fyne; she was big enough, indeed, to give plenty of work to everybody on board of her, and when once she had got into harbour, and things put to rights, her chief state-room proved a jolly and comfortable little place enough. They had some pleasant evenings in this way after the work of the day was over; when the swinging lamps shone down on the table that was furnished with wine-glasses, bottles, cigars, and cards. Johnny was very proud of being in command, and of his exploit in doubling the Mull. He was continually consulting charts and compasses, and going on deck to communicate his last opinion to his skipper. Mosenberg, too, was getting better accustomed to the hardships of yachting, and learning how to secure a fair amount of comfort. Lavender never said that he wished to go near Lewis; but there was a sort of tacit

understanding that their voyage should tend in that direction.

They had a little rough weather on reaching Skye, and, in consequence, remained in harbour a couple of days. At the end of that time a happy opportunity presented itself of cutting across the Little Minch—the Great Minch was considered a trifle risky—to Loch Maddy in North Uist. They were now in the Western Islands; and strange indeed was the appearance which the bleak region presented at this time of the year—the lonely coasts, the multitudes of wild fowl, the half-savage, wondering inhabitants, the treeless wastes, and desolate rocks. What these remote and melancholy islands might have looked like in fog and misty rain could only be imagined, however; for fortunately, the longed-for north-easter had set in, and there were wan glimmerings of sunshine across the sea and the solitary shores. They remained in Loch Maddy but a single day; and then, still favoured by a brisk north-east breeze, made their way through the Sound of Harris, and got to leeward of the conjoint island of Harris and Lewis. There, indeed, were the great mountains which Lavender had seen many a time from the north; and now they were close at hand, and dark, and forbidding. The days were brief at this time, and they were glad to put into Loch Resort, which Lavender had once seen in company with old Mackenzie, when they had come into the neighbourhood on a salmon-fishing excursion.

The *Phœbe* was at her anchorage, the clatter on deck over, and Johnny came below to see what sort of repast could be got for the evening. It was not a very grand meal, but he said—

"I propose that we have a bottle of champagne to

celebrate our arrival at the island of Lewis. Did you ever see anything more successfully done? And now, if this wind continues, we can creep up to-morrow to Loch Roag, Lavender, if you would like to have a look at it."

For a moment the colour forsook Lavender's face.

"No, thank you, Johnny," he was about to say, when his friend interrupted him.

"Look here, Lavender; I know you would like to see the place, and you can do it easily without being seen. No one knows me. When we anchor in the bay, I suppose Mr. Mackenzie—as is the hospitable and praiseworthy custom of these parts—will send a message to the yacht and ask us to dine with him. I, at any rate, can go up and call on him, and make excuses for you; and then I could tell you, you know——"

Johnny hesitated.

"Would you do that for me, Johnny?" Lavender said. "Well, you are a good fellow."

"Oh," Johnny said, lightly, "it's a capital adventure for me; and perhaps I could ask Mackenzie—Mr. Mackenzie, I beg your pardon—to let me have two or three clay pipes, for this brier root is rapidly going to the devil."

"He will give you anything he has in the house; you never saw such a hospitable fellow, Johnny. But you must take great care what you do."

"You trust to me. In the meantime, let's see what Pate knows about Loch Roag."

Johnny called down his skipper, a bluff, short, red-faced man, who presently appeared, his cap in his hand.

"Will you have a glass of champagne, Pate?"

"Oh, ay, sir," he said, not very eagerly.

"Would you rather have a glass of whisky?"

"Well, sir," Pate said, in accents that showed that his Highland pronunciation had been corrupted by many years' residence in Greenock, "I was thinkin' the whisky was a wee thing better for ye on a cauld nicht."

"Here you are, then. Now, tell me, do you know Loch Roag?"

"Oh, ay, fine. Many's the time I hiv been in to Borvabost."

"But," said Lavender, "do you know the Loch itself? Do you know the bay on which Mackenzie's house stands?"

"Weel, I'm no sae sure about that, sir. But if ye want to gang there, we can pick up some bit body at Borvabost that will tak' us round."

"Well," Lavender said, "I think I can tell you how to go. I know the channel is quite simple—there are no rocks about—and once you are round the point you will see your anchorage."

"It's twa or three years since I was there, sir," Pate remarked, as he put the glass back on the table; "I mind there was a daft auld man there that played the pipes."

"That was old John the Piper!" Lavender said. "Don't you remember Mr. Mackenzie, whom they call the King of Borva?"

"Weel, sir, I never saw him, but I was aware he was in the place. I have never been up here afore wi' a party o' gentlemen, and he wasna coming down to see the like o' us."

With what a strange feeling Lavender beheld, the following afternoon, the opening to the great Loch that he knew so well. He recognized the various rocky promontories, the Gaelic names of which Sheila

had translated for him. Down there in the south were the great heights of Suainabhal, and Cracabhal, and Mealasabhal. Right in front was the sweep of Borvabost Bay, and its huts, and its small garden patches; and up beyond it was the hill on which Sheila used to sit in the evening, to watch the sun go down behind the Atlantic. It was like entering again a world with which he had once been familiar, and in which he had left behind a peaceful happiness he had sought in vain elsewhere. Somehow, as the yacht dipped to the waves, and slowly made her way into the loch, it seemed to him that he was coming home —that he was returning to the old and quiet joys he had experienced there—that all the past time that had darkened his life was now to be removed. But when, at last, he saw Mackenzie's house high up there over the tiny bay, a strange thrill of excitement passed through him, and that was followed by a cold feeling of despair, which he did not seek to remove.

He stood on the companion, his head only being visible, and directed Pate until the *Phœbe* had arrived at her moorings; and then he went below. He had looked wistfully for a time up to the square, dark house, with its scarlet copings, in the vague hope of seeing some figure he knew; but now, sick at heart, and fearing that Mackenzie might make him out with a glass, he sat down in the state-room, alone, and silent, and miserable.

He was startled by the sound of oars, and got up and listened. Mosenberg came down and said—

"Mr. Mackenzie has sent a tall, thin man—do you know him?—to see who we are, and whether we will go up to his house."

"What did Eyre say?"

"I don't know. I suppose he is going."

Then Johnny himself came below. He was a sensitive young fellow; and at this moment he was very confused, excited, and nervous.

"Lavender," he said stammering somewhat, "I am going up now to Mackenzie's house. You know whom I shall see. Shall I take any message—if I see a chance—if your name is mentioned—a hint, you know——"

"Tell her," Lavender said, with a sudden pallor of determination in his face: but he stopped, and said abruptly, "Never mind, Johnny. Don't say anything about me."

"Not to-night, anyway," Johnny said to himself, as he drew on his best blue jacket, with its shining brass buttons, and went up the companion to see if the small boat was ready.

Johnny had had a good deal of knocking about the Western Highlands, and was familiar with the frank and ready hospitality which the local lairds—more particularly in the remote islands, where a stranger brought recent newspapers and a breath of the outer world with him—granted to all comers who bore with them the credentials of owning a yacht. But never before had he gone up to a strange house with such perturbation of spirit. He had been so anxious, too, that he had left no time for preparation. When he started up the hill, he could see, in the gathering dusk, that the tall keeper had just entered the house, and when he arrived there, he found absolutely nobody about the place.

In ordinary circumstances he would simply have walked in, and called some one from the kitchen. But he now felt himself somewhat of a spy; and was not

a little afraid of meeting the handsome Mrs. Lavender, of whom he had heard so much. There was no light in the passage; but there was a bright-red gloom in one of the windows, and, almost inadvertently, he glanced in there. What was this strange picture he saw? The red flame of the fire showed him the grand figures on the walls of Sheila's dining-room, and lit up the white table-cover and the crystal in the middle of the apartment. A beautiful young girl, clad in a tight blue dress, had just risen from beside the fire to light two candles that were on the table; and then she went back to her seat, and took up her sewing, but not to sew. For Johnny saw her gently kneel down beside a little bassinet that was a mass of wonderful pink and white, and he supposed the door in the passage was open, for he could hear a low voice humming some lullaby-song, sung by the young mother to her child. He went back a step, bewildered by what he had seen. Could he fly down to the shore, and bring Lavender up to look at this picture through the window, and beg of him to go in and throw himself on her forgiveness and mercy? He had not time to think twice. At this moment Mairi appeared in the dusky passage, looking a little scared, although she did not drop the plates she carried.

"Oh, sir, and are you the gentleman that has come in the yacht? And, Mr. Mackenzie, he is upstairs just now, but he will be down ferry soon; and will you come in and speak to Miss Sheila?"

"*Miss Sheila?*" he repeated to himself, with amazement; and the next moment he found himself before this beautiful young girl, apologizing to her, stammering, and wishing that he had never undertaken such a task, while he knew that all the time she was regard-

ing him with her large, calm, and gentle eyes, and that there was no trace of embarrassment in her manner.

"Will you take a seat by the fire until papa comes down?" she said. "We are very glad to have anyone come to see us; we do not have many visitors in the winter."

"But I am afraid," he stammered, "I am putting you to trouble——" and he glanced at the swinging pink and white couch.

"Oh no," Sheila said, with a smile, "I was just about to send my little boy to bed."

She lifted the sleeping child and rolled it in some enormous covering of white and silken-haired fur, and gave the small bundle to Mairi to carry to Scarlett.

"Stop a bit?" Johnny called out to Mairi; and the girl started and looked round, whereupon he said to Sheila, with much blushing, "Isn't there a superstition about an infant waking to find silver in its hand? I am sure you wouldn't mind my——"

"He cannot hold anything yet," Sheila said, with a smile.

"Then, Mairi, you must put this below his pillow —is not that the same thing for luck?" he said, addressing the young Highland girl as if he had known her all his life; and Mairi went away proud and pleased to have this precious bundle to carry, and talking to it with a thousand soft and endearing phrases in her native tongue.

Mackenzie came in, and found the two talking together.

"How do you do, sir?" he said, with a grave courtesy. "You are ferry welcome to the island, and if there is anything you want for the boat, you will hef it from us. She is a little thing to hef come so far."

"She's not very big," Johnny said, "but she's a thorough good sailor; and then we watch our time, you know. But I don't think we shall go further north than Lewis."

"Hef you no friends on board with you?" Mackenzie asked.

"Oh yes," Johnny answered; "two. But we did not wish to invade your house in a body. To-morrow——"

"To-morrow!" said Mackenzie, impatiently. "No, but to-night! Duncan, come here! Duncan, go down to the boat that has just come in and tell the gentlemen——"

"I beg your pardon, sir," Johnny cried, "but my two friends are regularly done up—tired—they were just going to turn in when I left the yacht. To-morrow, now, you will see them——"

"Oh, ferry well, ferry well," said Mackenzie, who had hoped to have a big dinner-party for Sheila's amusement. "In any way, you will stop and hef some dinner? It is just ready—oh, yes—and it is not a ferry fine dinner; but it will be different from your cabin for you to sit ashore."

"Well, if you will excuse me," Johnny was about to say, for he was so full of the news that he had to tell that he would have sacrificed twenty dinners to have got off at this moment. But Mr. Mackenzie would take no denial. An additional cover was laid for the stranger, and Johnny sat down to stare at Sheila in a furtive way, and to talk to her father about everything that was happening in the great world.

"And what now is this," said Mackenzie, with a lofty and careless air, "what is this I see in the papers about pictures painted by a gentleman called Laven-

der? I hev a great interest in these exhibitions: perhaps you hev seen the pictures?"

Johnny blushed very red; but he hid his face over his plate; and presently he answered, without daring to look at Sheila—

"I should think I have seen them! Why, if you care for coast landscapes, I can tell you you never saw such thorough good work all your life! Why, everybody's talking of them—you never heard of a man making such a name for himself in so short a time."

He ventured to look up. There was a strange, proud light in the girl's face; and the effect of it on this bearer of good tidings was to make him launch into such praises of these pictures as considerably astonished old Mackenzie. As for Sheila, she was proud and happy, but not surprised. She had known in all along. She had waited for it patiently, and it had come at last, although she was not to share in his triumph.

"I know some people who know him," said Johnny, who had taken two or three glasses of Mackenzie's sherry, and felt bold; "and what a shame it is he should go away from all his friends and almost cease to have any communication with them. And then, of all the places in the world to spend a winter in, Jura is about the very——"

"Jura!" said Sheila, quickly, and he fancied that her face paled somewhat.

"I believe so," he said; "somewhere on the western coast, you know, over the Sound of Islay."

Sheila was obviously very much agitated; but her father said in a careless way, "Oh yes, Jura is not a ferry good place in the winter. And the west side you said? Ay, there are not many houses on the west

side; it is not a ferry good place to live in. But it will be ferry cheap, whatever."

"I don't think that is the reason of his living there," said Johnny, with a laugh.

"But," Mackenzie urged, rather anxiously, "you wass not saying he would get much for these pictures? Oh no, who will give much money for pictures of rocks and seaweed? Oh no!"

"Oh, won't they, though?" Johnny cried. "They give a good deal more for that sort of picture now than for the old-fashioned cottage-scenes, with a young lady, dressed in a drugget petticoat and a pink jacket, sitting peeling potatoes. Don't you make any mistake about that. The public is beginning to learn what real good work is, and, by Jove, don't they pay for it, too? Lavender got 800*l.* for the smaller of the two pictures I told you about."

Johnny was beginning to forget that the knowledge he was showing of Frank Lavender's affairs was suspiciously minute.

"Oh no, sir," Mackenzie said, with a frown. "It is all nonsense the stories that you hear. I hef had great experience of these exhibitions. I hef been to London several times, and every time I wass in the Exhibitions."

"But I should know something of it, too; for I am an artist myself."

"And do you get 800*l.* for a small picture?" Mackenzie asked, severely.

"Well, no," Johnny said, with a laugh. "But then I am a duffer."

After dinner, Sheila left the room; Johnny fancied he knew where she was going. He pulled in a chair to the fire, lit his pipe, and said he would have but

one glass of toddy, which Mackenzie proceeded to make for him. And then he said to the old King of Borva—

"I beg your pardon, sir; but will you allow me to suggest that that young girl who was in here before dinner should not call your daughter Miss Sheila before strangers?"

"Oh, it is very foolish!" said Mackenzie, "but it is an old habit, and they will not stop it. And Duncan, he is worse than anyone."

"Duncan, I suppose, is the tall fellow who waited at dinner?"

"Oh aye, that is Duncan."

Johnny's ingenious bit of stratagem had failed. He wanted to have old Mackenzie call his daughter Mrs. Lavender, so that he might have had occasion to open the question and plead for his friend. But the old man resolutely ignored the relationship between Lavender and his daughter, so far as this stranger was concerned; and so Johnny had to go away partly disappointed.

But another opportunity might occur; and in the meantime was not he carrying rare news down to the *Phœbe*? He had lingered too long in the house; but now he made up for lost time, and once or twice nearly missed his footing in running down the steep path. He had to find the small boat for himself, and go out on the slippery stones and seaweed to get into her. Then he pulled away from the shore, his oars striking white fire into the dark water, the water gurgling at the bow. Then he got into the shadow of the black hull of the yacht, and Pate was there to lower the little gangway.

When Johnny stepped on deck, he paused, in con-

siderable doubt as to what he should do. He wished to have a word with Lavender alone; how could he go down with such a message as he had to deliver to a couple of fellows probably smoking and playing chess?

"Pate," he said, "tell Mr. Lavender I want him to come on deck for a minute."

"He's by himsel', sir," Pate said. "He's been sitting by himsel' for the last hour. The young gentleman's lain doon."

Johnny went down into the little cabin; Lavender, who had neither book, nor cigar, nor any other sign of occupation near him, seemed in his painful anxiety almost incapable of asking the question that rose to his lips.

"Have you seen her, Johnny?" he said, at length, with his face looking strangely careworn.

Johnny was an impressionable young fellow. There were tears running freely down his cheeks, as he said—

"Yes, I have, Lavender; and she was rocking a child in a cradle."

CHAPTER XII.

Redintegratio Amoris.

THAT same night Sheila dreamed a strange dream; and it seemed to her that an angel of God came to her, and stood before her, and looked at her with his shining face and his sad eyes. And he said, "*Are you a woman, and yet slow to forgive? Are you a mother, and have you no love for the father of your child?*" It seemed to her that she could not answer. She fell on her knees before him, and covered her face with her hands, and wept. And when she raised her eyes again, the angel was gone; and in his place Ingram was there,

stretching out his hand to her, and bidding her rise and be comforted. Yet he, too, spoke in the same reproachful tones, and said—

"What would become of us all, Sheila, if none of our actions were to be condoned by time and repentance? What would become of us if we could not say, at some particular point of our lives, to the bygone time, that we had left it, with all its errors, and blunders, and follies, behind us, and would, with the help of God, start clear on a new sort of life? What would it be if there were no forgetfulness for any of us—no kindly veil to come down and shut out the memory of what we have done—if the staring record were to be kept for ever before our eyes? And you are a woman, Sheila—it should be easy for you to forgive, and to encourage, and to hope for better things of the man you love. Has he not suffered enough? Have you no word for him?"

The sound of her sobbing in the night-time brought her father to the door. He tapped at the door, and said—

"What is the matter, Sheila?"

She awoke with a slight cry; and he went into the room and found her in a strangely troubled state, her hands outstretched to him, her eyes wet and wild.

"Papa, I have been very cruel. I am not fit to live any more. There is no woman in the world would have done what I have done."

"Sheila!" he said, "you hef been dreaming again about all that folly and nonsense. Lie down, like a good lass. You will wake the boy if you do not lie down and go to sleep; and to-morrow we will pay a visit to the yacht that hass come in, and you will ask the gentlemen to look at the *Maighdean-mhara*."

"Papa," she said, "to-morrow I want you to take me to Jura."

"To Jura, Sheila? You cannot go to Jura! You cannot leave the baby with Mairi, Sheila."

"I will take him with me," she said.

"Oh, it is not possible at all, Sheila. But I will go to Jura. Oh yes, I will go to Jura. Indeed, I was thinking last night that I would go to Jura."

"Oh no, *you* must not go," she cried. "You would speak harshly—and he is very proud—and we should never see each other again. Papa, I know you will do this for me—you will let me go——"

"It is foolish of you, Sheila," her father said, "to think that I do not know how to arrange such a thing without making a quarrel of it. But you will see all about it in the morning. Just now, you will lie down, like a good lass, and go to sleep. So good night, Sheila, and do not think of it any more till the morning."

She thought of it all through the night, however. She thought of her sailing away down through the cold wintry seas to search that lonely coast. Would the grey dawn break with snow; or would the kindly heavens lend her some fair sunlight as she set forth on her lonely quest? And all the night through she accused herself of being hard of heart; and blamed herself, indeed, for all that had happened in the bygone time. Just as the day was coming in she fell asleep; and she dreamed that she went to the angel whom she had seen before, and knelt down at his feet, and repeated in some vague way the promises she had made on her marriage morning. With her head bent down, she said that she would live and die a true wife, if only another chance were given her. The

angel answered nothing; but he smiled with his sad eyes, and put his hand for a moment on her head, and then disappeared. When she woke Mairi was in the room, silently stealing away the child; and the white daylight was clear in the windows.

She dressed with trembling hands, and yet there was a faint suffused sense of joy in her heart. She wondered if her father would keep to his promise of the night before, or whether it had been made to get her to rest. In any case, she knew that he could not refuse her much; and had not he himself said that he intended going away down to Jura?

"Sheila, you are not looking well this morning," her father said; "it is foolish of you to lie awake and think of such things. And as for what you wass saying about Jura, how can you go to Jura? We hef no boat big enough for that. I could go—oh yes, I could go—but the boat I would get at Stornoway you could not go in it at all, Sheila; and as for the baby——"

"But then, Papa," she said, "did not the gentleman who was here last night say they were going back by Jura? And it is a big yacht; and he has only two friends on board. He might take us down."

"You cannot ask a stranger, Sheila. Besides, the boat is too small a one for this time of the year. I should not like to see you go in her, Sheila."

"I have no fear," the girl said.

"No fear!" her father said, impatiently. "No, of course you hef no fear—that is the mischief. You will tek no care of yourself whatever."

"When is the young gentleman coming up this morning?"

"Oh, he will not come up again till I go down.

Will you go down to the boats, Sheila, and go on board of her?"

Sheila assented; and some half hour thereafter she stood at the door, clad in her tight-fitting blue serge, with the hat and sea-gull's wing over her splendid masses of hair. It was an angry-looking morning enough; rags of grey cloud were being hurried past the shoulders of Suainabhal; a heavy surf was beating on the shore.

"There is going to be rain, Sheila," her father said, smelling the moisture in the keen air. "Will you hef your waterproof?"

"Oh no," she said; "if I am to meet strangers, I cannot wear a waterproof."

The sharp wind had brought back the colour to her cheeks; and there was some gladness in her eyes. She knew she might have a fight for it, before she could persuade her father to set sail in this strange boat; but she never doubted for a moment—recollecting the gentle face and modest manner of the youthful owner—that he would be really glad to do her a service, and she knew that her father's opposition would give way.

"Shall we take Bras, papa?"

"No, no!" her father said; "we will hef to go in a small boat. I hope you will not get wet, Sheila—there is a good breeze on the water this morning."

"I think they are much safer in here than going round the islands just at present," Sheila said.

"Ay, you are right there, Sheila," her father said, looking at the direction of the wind. "They got in in ferry good time. And they may hef to stay here for a while before they can face the sea again."

"And we shall become very great friends with

them, Papa; and they will be glad to take us to Jura," she said, with a smile; for she knew there was not much of the hospitality of Borvabost bestowed with ulterior motives.

They went down the steep path to the bay, where the *Phœbe* was lurching and heaving in the rough swell, her bowsprit sometimes nearly catching the crest of a wave. No one was on deck. How were they to get on board?

"They can't hear you in this wind," Sheila said. "We will have to haul down our own boat."

And that, indeed, they had to do; though the work of getting the little thing down the beach was not very arduous for a man of Mackenzie's build.

"I am going to pull you out to the yacht, papa," Sheila said.

"Indeed you will do no such thing," her father said, indignantly. "As if you wass a fisherman's lass, and the gentlemen never wass seeing you before. Sit down in the stern, Sheila, and hold on ferry tight, for it is a rough water for this little boat."

They had almost got out indeed to the yacht before anyone was aware of their approach; but Pate appeared in time to seize the rope that Mackenzie flung him, and, with a little scrambling, they were at last safely on board. The noise of their arrival, however, startled Johnny Eyre, who was lying on his back smoking a pipe after breakfast. He jumped up, and said to Mosenberg, who was his only companion—

"Hillo! here's this old gentleman come on board. He knows you? What's to be done?"

"Done?" said the boy, with a moment's hesitation; and then a flush of decision sprang into his face. "Ask him to come down. Yes; I will speak to him,

and tell him that Lavender is on the island. Perhaps he meant to go into the house; who knows? If he did not, let us make him!"

"All right," said Johnny; "let's go a buster."

Then he called up the companion to Pate, to send the gentleman below, while he flung a few things aside, to make the place more presentable. Johnny had been engaged, a few minutes before, in sewing a button on a woollen shirt; and that article of attire does not look well beside a breakfast-table.

His visitor began to descend the narrow wooden steps; and presently Mackenzie was heard to say—

"Tek great care, Sheila. The brass is ferry slippery."

"Oh, thunder!" Johnny said, looking to Mosenberg.

"Good morning, Mr. Eyre," said the old King of Borva, stooping to get into the cabin; "it is a rough day you are getting. Sheila, mind your head till you have passed the door."

Mackenzie came forward to shake hands, and in doing so caught sight of Mosenberg. The whole truth flashed upon him in a moment; and he instantaneously turned to Sheila, and said, quickly—

"Sheila, go up on deck for a moment."

But she, too, had seen the lad; and she came forward, with a pale face, but with a perfectly self-possessed manner, and said, "How do you do? It is a surprise, your coming to the island; but you often used to talk of it."

"Yes," he stammered, as he shook hands with her and her father, "I often wished to come here. What a wild place it is! And have you lived here, Mrs. Lavender, all the time since you left London?"

"Yes, I have."

Mackenzie was getting very uneasy. Every moment

he expected Lavender would enter this confined little cabin; and was this the place for these two to meet, before a lot of acquaintances?

"Sheila," he said, "it is too close for you here, and I am going to have a pipe with the gentlemen. Now if you wass a good lass, you would go ashore again, and go up to the house, and say to Mairi that we will all come for luncheon at one o'clock, and she must get some fish up from Borvabost. Mr. Eyre, he will send a man ashore with you in his own boat, that is bigger than mine, and you will show him the creek to put into. Now go away, like a good lass, and we will be up ferry soon—oh yes, we will be up directly at the house."

"I am sure," Sheila said to Johnny Eyre, "we can make you more comfortable up at the house than you are here, although it is a nice little cabin." And then she turned to Mosenberg, and said, "And we have a great many things to talk about."

"Could she suspect?" Johnny asked himself, as he escorted her to the boat, and pulled her in himself to the shore. Her face was pale, and her manner a trifle formal; otherwise she showed no sign. He watched her go along the stones till she reached the path; then he pulled out to the *Phœbe* again, and went down below to entertain his host of the previous evening.

Sheila walked slowly up the rude little path, taking little heed of the blustering wind and the hurrying clouds. Her eyes were bent down; her face was pale. When she got to the top of the hill, she looked, in a blank sort of way, all round the bleak moorland; but probably she did not expect to see anyone there. Then she walked, with rather an uncertain step, into the house.

She looked into the room, the door of which stood

open. Her husband sate there, with his arms outstretched on the table, and his head buried in his hands. He did not hear her approach, her footfall was so light; and it was with the same silent step she went into the room, and knelt down beside him, and put her hands and face on his knee, and said simply—

"I beg for your forgiveness."

He started up and looked at her as though she were some spirit, and his own face was haggard and strange.

"Sheila," he said, in a low voice, laying his hand gently on her head, "it is I who ought to be there, and you know it. But I cannot meet your eyes. I am not going to ask for your forgiveness just yet—I have no right to expect it. All I want is this—if you will let me come and see you just as before we were married—and if you will give me a chance of winning your consent over again—we can at least be friends until then—— But why do you cry, Sheila? You have nothing to reproach yourself with."

She rose, and regarded him for a moment with her streaming eyes; and then, moved by the passionate entreaty of her face, and forgetting altogether the separation and time of trial he had proposed, he caught her to his bosom, and kissed her forehead, and talked soothingly and caressingly to her, as if she were a child.

"I cry," she said, "because I am happy—because I believe all that time is over—because I think you will be kind to me. And I will try to be a good wife to you; and you will forgive me all that I have done."

"You are heaping coals of fire on my head, Sheila," he said, humbly. "You know I have nothing to forgive. As for you—I tell you I have no right to expect your forgiveness yet. But I think you will find out

by and by that my repentance is not a mere momentary thing. I have had a long time to think over what has happened—and what I lost when I lost you, Sheila."

"But you have found me again," the girl said, pale a little, and glad to sit down on the nearest couch, while she held his hand and drew him towards her. "And now I must ask you for one thing."

He was sitting beside her: he feared no longer to meet the look of those earnest, meek, affectionate eyes.

"This is it," she said. "If we are to be together, not what we were, but something quite different from that, will you promise me never to say one word about what is past—to shut it out altogether—to forget it?"

"I cannot, Sheila," he said. "Am I to have no chance of telling you how well I know how cruel I was to you—how sorry I am for it?"

"No," she said, firmly. "If you have some things to regret, so have I; and what is the use of competing with each other as to which has the most forgiveness to ask for? Frank, dear, you will do this for me. You will promise never to speak one word about that time."

How earnest the beautiful, sad face was! He could not withstand the entreaty of the piteous eyes. He said to her, abashed by the great love that she showed, and hopeless of making other reparation than obedience to her generous wish—

"Let it be so, Sheila. I will never speak a word about it. You will see otherwise than in words whether I forget what is passed, and your goodness in letting it go. But, Sheila," he added, with downcast face, "Johnny Eyre was here last night—he told me——" He had to say no more. She took his hand, and led him gently and silently out of the room.

Meanwhile the old King of Borva had been spending a somewhat anxious time down in the cabin of the *Phœbe*. Many and many a day had he been planning a method by which he might secure a meeting between Sheila and her husband; and now it had all come about without his aid, and in a manner which rendered him unable to take any precautions. He did not know but that some awkward accident might destroy all the chances of the affair. He knew that Lavender was in the island. He had frankly asked young Mosenberg as soon as Sheila had left the yacht.

"Oh yes," the lad said, "he went away into the island early this morning. I begged of him to go to your house; he did not answer. But I am sure he will. I know he will."

"My Kott!" Mackenzie said, "and he has been wandering about the island all the morning, and he will be very faint and hungry; and a man is neffer in a good temper then for making up a quarrel. If I had known the last night, I could hef had dinner with you all here, and we should hef given him a good glass of whisky, and then it wass a good time to tek him up to the house."

"Oh, you may depend on it, Mr. Mackenzie," Johnny Eyre said, "that Lavender needs no stimulus of that sort to make him desire a reconciliation. No, I should think not. He has done nothing but brood over this affair ever since he left London; and I should not be surprised if you scarcely knew him, he is so altered. You would fancy he had lived ten years in the time."

"Ay, ay," Mackenzie said, not listening very attentively, and evidently thinking more of what might be happening elsewhere; "but I was thinking, gentle-

men, it wass time for us to go ashore, and go up to the house, and hef something to eat."

"I thought you said one o'clock for luncheon, sir," young Mosenberg said.

"One o'clock!" Mackenzie repeated, impatiently; "who the teffle can wait till one o'clock, if you hef been walking about an island since the daylight with nothing to eat or drink."

Mr. Mackenzie forgot that it was not Lavender he had asked to lunch.

"Oh yes," he said, "Sheila hass had plenty of time to send down to Borvabost for some fish; and by the time you get up to the house, you will see that it is ready."

"Very well," Johnny said, "we can go up to the house, any way."

He went up the companion, and he had scarcely got his head above the level of the bulwarks when he called back——

"I say, Mr. Mackenzie, here is Lavender on the shore, and your daughter is with him. Do they want to come on board do you think? Or do they want us to go ashore?"

Mackenzie uttered a few phrases in Gaelic, and got up on deck instantly. There, sure enough, was Sheila, with her hand on her husband's arm; and they were both looking towards the yacht. The wind was blowing too strong for them to call. Mackenzie wanted himself to pull in for them; but this was overruled; and Pate was despatched.

An awkward pause ensued. The three standing on deck were sorely perplexed as to the forthcoming interview, and as to what they should do. Were they to

rejoice over a reconciliation; or ignore the fact altogether, and simply treat Sheila as Mrs. Lavender? Her father, indeed, fearing that Sheila would be strangely excited, and would probably burst into tears, wondered what he could get to scold her about.

Fortunately, an incident, partly ludicrous, broke the awkwardness of their arrival. The getting on deck was a matter of some little difficulty; in the scuffle Sheila's small hat with its snow-white feather got unloosed somehow, and the next minute it was whirled away by the wind into the sea. Pate could not be sent after it just at the moment, and it was rapidly drifting away to leeward, when Johnny Eyre, with a laugh and a "Here goes!" plunged in after the white feather that was dripping and rising in the waves like a sea-gull. Sheila uttered a slight cry, and caught her husband's arm. But there was not much danger. Johnny was an expert swimmer; and in a few minutes he was seen to be making his way backward with one arm, while in the other hand he held Sheila's hat. Then Pate had by this time got the small boat round to leeward; and very shortly after Johnny, dripping like a Newfoundland dog, came on deck and presented the hat to Sheila, amidst a vast deal of laughter.

"I am so sorry," she said; "but you must change your clothes quickly—I hope you will have no harm from it."

"Not I," he said, "but my beautiful white decks have got rather into a mess. I am glad you saw them while they were dry, Mrs. Lavender. Now I am going below to make myself a swell, for we're all going to have luncheon on shore, ain't we?"

Johnny went below very well pleased with himself. He had called her Mrs. Lavender without wincing. He

had got over all the awkwardness of a second introduction by the happy notion of plunging after the hat. He had to confess, however, that the temperature of the sea was not just what he could have preferred for a morning bath.

By and by he made his appearance in his best suit of blue and brass buttons, and asked Mrs. Lavender if she would now come down and see the cabin.

"I think you want a good glass of whisky," old Mackenzie said, as they all went below, "the water it is ferry cold just now."

"Yes," Johnny said, blushing, "we shall all celebrate the capture of the hat."

It was the capture of the hat, then, that was to be celebrated by this friendly ceremony. Perhaps it was; but there was no mirth now on Sheila's face.

"And you will drink first, Sheila," her father said, almost solemnly, "and you will drink to your husband's health."

Sheila took the glass of raw whisky in her hand; and looked round timidly.

"I cannot drink this, papa," she said. "If you will let me——"

"You will drink that glass to your husband's health, Sheila," old Mackenzie said, with unusual severity.

"She shall do nothing of the sort if she doesn't like it!" Johnny Eyre cried, suddenly—not caring whether it was the wrath of old Mackenzie or of the devil that he was braving; and forthwith he took the glass out of Sheila's hand, and threw the whisky on the floor. Then he pulled out a champagne bottle from a basket and said, "This is what Mrs. Lavender will drink."

Mackenzie looked staggered for a moment. He had never been so braved before. But he was not in a quarrelsome mood on such an occasion; so he burst into a loud laugh, and cried——

"Well, did ever any man see the like o' that! Good whisky—ferry good whisky—and flung on the floor as if it was water; and as if there wass no one in the boat that would hef drunk it. But no matter, Mr. Eyre, no matter; the lass will drink whatever you give her, for she's a good lass; and if we hef all to drink champagne that is no matter too; but there is a man or two up on deck that would not like to know the whisky was spoiled."

"Oh," Johnny said, "there is still a drop left for them. And this is what you must drink, Mrs. Lavender."

Lavender had sat down in a corner of the cabin, his eyes averted. When he heard Sheila's name mentioned he looked up, and she came forward to him. She said, in a simple way, "I drink this to you, my dear husband," and at the same moment the old King of Borva came forward and held out his hand, and said, "Yes; and by Kott, I drink to your health, too, with ferry good will."

Lavender started to his feet.

"Wait a bit, Mr. Mackenzie. I have got something to say to you before you ought to shake my hand."

But Sheila interposed quickly. She put her hand on his arm, and looked into his face.

"You will keep your promise to me," she said; and that was an end of the matter. The two men shook hands; there was nothing said between them, then or again, of what was over and gone.

They had a pleasant enough luncheon together, up in that quaint room, with the Tyrolese pictures on

the wall; and Duncan for once respected old Mackenzie's threats as to what would happen if he called Sheila anything but Mrs. Lavender before these strangers. For some time Lavender sat almost silent; and answered Sheila, who continuously talked to him, in little else than monosyllables. But he looked at her a great deal, sometimes in a wistful sort of way, as if he were trying to recall the various fancies her face used to produce in his imagination.

"Why do you look at me so?" she said in an undertone.

"Because I have made a new friend," he said.

But when Mackenzie began to talk of the wonders of the island and the seas around it, and to beg the young yachtsmen to prolong their stay, Lavender joined with a will in that conversation, and added his entreaties.

"Then you are going to stay?" Johnny Eyre said, looking up.

"Oh, yes," he answered, as if the alternative of going back with them had not presented itself to him.

"For one thing, I have got to look out for a place where I can build a house. That is what I mean to do with my savings just at present; and if you would come with me, Johnny, and have a prowl round the island, to find out some pretty little bay with a good anchorage in it—for you know I am going to steal that *Maighdean-mhara* from Mr. Mackenzie—then we can begin and make ourselves architects, and plan out the place that is to be. And then some day——"

Mackenzie had been sitting in mute astonishment; but he suddenly broke in upon his son-in-law.

"On this island? No, by Kott, you will not do that. On this island? And with all the people at Stornoway? Hoots, no, that will neffer do; Sheila, she

hass no one to speak to on this island as a young lass should hef; and you—what would you do yourself in the bad weather? But there is Stornoway—oh yes, that is a fine big place, and many people you will get to know there, and you will hef the newspapers and the letters at once; and there will be always boats there, that you can go to Oban, to Greenock, to Glasgow—anywhere in the world—whenever you hef a mind to do that; and then when you go to London, as you will hef to go many times, there will be plenty there to look after your house when it is shut up, and keep the rain out, and the paint and the paper good, more as could be done on this island. Oh, this island!—how would you live on this island?"

The old King of Borva spoke quite impatiently and contemptuously of the place. You would have thought his life on this island was a species of penal servitude; and that he dwelt in his solitary house only to think with a vain longing of the glories and delights of Stornoway. Lavender knew well what prompted these scornful comments on Borva. The old man was afraid that the island would really be too dull for Sheila and her husband; and that, whereas the easy compromise of Stornoway might be practicable, to set up house in Borva might lead them to abandon the north altogether.

"From what I have heard of it from Mr. Lavender," Johnny said, with a laugh, "I don't think this island such a dreadful place; and I'm hanged if I have found it so, so far."

"But you will know nothing about it—nothing whateffer," said Mackenzie, petulantly. "You do not know the bad weather, when you cannot go down the

Loch to Callernish; and you might hef to go to London just then."

"Well, I suppose London could wait," Johnny said.

Mackenzie began to get angry with this young man.

"You hef not been to Stornoway," he said, severely.

"No, I haven't," Johnny replied, with much coolness, "and I don't hanker after it. I get plenty of town life in London; and when I come up to the sea and the islands I'd rather pitch my tent with you, sir, than live in Stornoway."

"Oh, but you don't know, Johnny, how fine a place Stornoway is," Lavender said, hastily, for he saw the old man was beginning to get vexed. "Stornoway was a beautiful little town, and it is on the sea, too——"

"And it hass fine houses, and ferry many people, and ferry good society whatever," Mackenzie added, with some touch of indignation.

"But you see, this is how it stands, Mr. Mackenzie," Lavender put in, humbly. "We should have to go to London from time to time, and we should then get quite enough of city life, and you might find an occasional trip with us not a bad thing. But up here I should have to look on my house as a sort of workshop. Now, with all respect to Stornoway, you must admit that the coast about here is a little more picturesque. Besides, there's another thing. It would be rather more difficult at Stornoway to take a rod or a gun out of a morning. Then there would be callers, bothering you at your work. Then Sheila would have far less liberty in going about by herself."

"Eighthly and tenthly, you've made up your mind to have a house here," cried Johnny Eyre with a loud laugh.

"Sheila says she would like to have a billiard-

room," her husband continued. "Where could you get that in Stornoway?"

"And you must have a large room for a piano, to sing in, and play in," the young Jew-boy said, looking at Sheila.

"I should think a one-storeyed house, with a large verandah, would be the best sort of thing," Lavender said, "both for the sun and the rain; and then one could have one's easle outside, you know. Suppose we all go for a walk round the shore by-and-by; there is too much of a breeze to take the *Phœbe* down the loch."

So the King of Borva was quietly overruled and his dominions invaded in spite of himself. Sheila could not go out with the gentlemen just then; she was to follow in about an hour's time; meanwhile they buttoned their coats, pulled down their caps tight, and set out to face the grey skies and the wintry wind. Just as they were passing away from the house, Mackenzie, who was walking in front with Lavender, said, in a cautious sort of way——

"You will want a deal of money to build this house you wass speaking about—for it will hef to be all stone and iron, and ferry strong whatever, or else it will be a plague to you from the one year to the next with the rain getting in."

"Oh yes," Lavender said, "it will have to be done well once for all; and what with rooms big enough to paint in, and play billiards in, and also a bedroom or two for friends who may come to stay with us, it will be an expensive business. But I have been very lucky, Mr. Mackenzie. It isn't the money I have, but the commissions I am offered, that warrant me going in for this house. I'll tell you about all these things

afterwards. In the meantime I shall have 2,400*l.*, or thereabouts, in a couple of months."

"But you hef more than that now," Mackenzie said, gravely. "This is what I wass going to tell you. The money that your aunt left, that is yours, every penny of it—oh yes, every penny and every farthing of it is yours, sure enough. For it wass Mr. Ingram hass told me all about it; and the old lady, she wanted him to take care of the money for Sheila; but what wass the good of the money to Sheila? My lass, she will hef plenty of money of her own; and I wanted to hef nothing to do with what Mr. Ingram said—but it wass all no use, and there iss the money now for you and for Sheila, every penny and every farthing of it."

Mackenzie ended by talking in an injured way, as if this business had seriously increased his troubles.

"But you know," Lavender said with amazement, "you know as well as I do that this money was definitely left to Ingram, and—you may believe me or not—I was precious glad of it when I heard it. Of course it would have been of more use to him if he had not been about to marry this American lady——"

"Oh, you hef heard that, then?" Mackenzie said.

"Mosenberg brought me the news. But are you quite sure about this affair? Don't you think this is merely a trick of Ingram's, to enable him to give the money to Sheila? That would be very like him. I know him of old."

"Well, I cannot help it if a man will tell lies," said Mackenzie. "But that is what he says is true. And he will not touch the money—indeed, he will hef plenty, as you say—but there it is for Sheila and you; and you will be able to build whatever house you like.

And if you wass thinking of having a bigger boat than the *Maighdean-mhara*——" the old man suggested.

Lavender jumped at that notion directly.

"What if we could get a yacht big enough to cruise anywhere in the summer months?" he said. "We might bring a party of people all the way from the Thames to Loch Roag, and cast anchor opposite Sheila's house. Fancy Ingram and his wife coming up like that in the autumn; and I know you could go over to Sir James and get us some shooting."

Mackenzie laughed grimly.

"We will see, we will see about that. I think there will be no great difficulty about getting a deer or two for you; and as for the salmon, there will be one or two left in the White Water—oh yes, we will hef a little shooting and a little fishing for any of your friends. And as for the boat, it will be ferry difficult to get a good big boat for such a purpose, without you wass planning and building one yourself; and that will be better, I think; for the yachts now-a-days they are all built for the racing, and you will hef a boat fifty tons, sixty tons, seventy tons, that hass no room in her below, but is nothing but a big heap of canvas and spars. But if you wass wanting a good, steady boat, with good cabins below for the leddies, and a good saloon that you could hef your dinner in all at once, then you will maybe come down with me to a shipbuilder I know in Glasgow—oh, he is a ferry good man—and we will see what can be done. There is a gentleman now in Dunoon—and they say he is a ferry great artist too—and he hass a schooner of sixty tons that I hef been in myself, and it wass just like a steamer below for the comfort of it. And when the boat is ready, I will get you ferry good sailors for her,

that will know every bit of the coast from Loch-Indaal to the Butt of Lewis, and I will see that they are ferry cheap for you, for I hef plenty of work for them in the winter. But I wass no saying yet," the old man added, "that you were right about coming to live in Borva. Stornoway is a good place to live in; and it is a fine harbour for repairs, if the boat was wanting repairs——"

"If she were, couldn't we send her round to Stornoway?"

"But the people in Stornoway—it iss the people in Stornoway," said Mackenzie, who was not going to give in without a grumble.

Well, they did not fix on a site for the house that afternoon. Sheila did not make her appearance. Lavender kept continually turning and looking over the long undulations of rock and moorland; and at length he said—

"Look here, Johnny, would you mind going on by yourselves? I think I shall walk back to the house."

"What is keeping that foolish girl?" her father said, impatiently. "It is something about the dinner, now, as if any one wass particular about a dinner in an island like this, where you can expect nothing. But at Stornoway—oh yes, they hef many things there."

"But I want you to come and dine with us on board the *Phœbe* to-night, sir," Johnny said. "It will be rather a lark, mind you; we make up a tight fit in that cabin. I wonder if Mrs. Lavender would venture; do you think she would, sir?"

"Oh no, not this evening, any way," said her father, "for I know she will expect you all to be up at the house this evening; and what would be the use of

tumbling about in the bay when you can be in a house. But it is ferry kind of you—oh yes, to-morrow night, then we will go down to the boat—but this night, I know Sheila will be ferry sorry if you do not come to the house."

"Well, let's go back now," Johnny said, "and if we've time, we might go down for our guns and have a try along the shore for an hour or so before the daylight goes. Fancy that chance at those wild duck!"

"Oh, but that is nothing," Mackenzie said, "to-morrow you will come with me up to the loch, and there you will hef some shooting: and in many other places I will show you, you will hef plenty of shooting."

They had just got back to the house when they found Sheila coming out. She had, as her father supposed, been detained by her preparations for entertaining their guests; but now she was free until dinner-time, and so the whole party went down to the shore to pay a visit to the *Phœbe*, and let Mackenzie have a look at the guns on board. Then they went up to the house, and found the tall and grim keeper with the baby in his arms, while Scarlett and Mairi were putting the finishing touches on the gleaming white table and its show of steel and crystal.

How strange it was to Sheila to sit at dinner there, and listen to her husband talking of boating and fishing and what not as he used to sit and talk in the olden time to her father, on the summer evenings, on the high rocks over Borvabost. The interval between that time and this seemed to go clean out of her mind. And yet there must have been some interval, for he was looking older, and sterner, and much rougher about the face now, after being buffetted about by wind and rain and sun during that long and solitary

stay in Jura. But it was very like the old times when they went into the little drawing-room, and when Mairi brought in the hot water, and the whisky, the tobacco and the long pipes; when the old King of Borva sate himself down in his great chair by the table, and when Lavender came to Sheila, and asked her if he would get out her music, and open the piano for her.

"Madame," young Mosenberg said to her, "it is a long time since I heard one of your strange Gaelic songs."

"Perhaps you never heard this one," Sheila said, and she began to sing the plaintive "Farewell to Glenshalloch." Many a time, indeed, of late had she sung its simple and pathetic air as a sort of lullaby, perhaps because it was gentle, monotonous, and melancholy, perhaps because there were lines here and there that she liked. Many a time had she sung—

Sleep sound, my sweet babe, there is nought to alarm thee,
The sons of the valley no power have to harm thee!
I'll sing thee to rest in the balloch untrodden,
With a coronach sad for the slain of Culloden.

But long before she had reached the end of it her father's patience gave way, and he said—

"Sheila, we will hef no more of those teffles of songs! We will hef a good song; and there is more than one of the gentlemen can sing a good song, and we do not wish to be always crying over the sorrows of other people. Now be a good lass, Sheila, and sing us a good cheerful song."

And Sheila, with great good-nature, suddenly struck a different key, and sang, with a spirit that delighted the old man—

The standard on the braes o' Mar,
Is up and streaming rarely!
The gathering pipe on Lochnagar,
Is sounding lang and clearly!

The Highlandmen, from hill and glen,
In martial hue, with bonnets blue,
Wi' belted plaids, and burnished blades,
Are coming late and early!

"Now that is a better kind of song—that is a teffle of a good song!" Mackenzie cried, keeping time to the music with his right foot, as if he were a piper playing in front of his regiment. "Wass there anything like that in your country, Mr. Mosenberg?"

"I don't know, sir," said the lad, meekly; "but if you like I will sing you one or two of our soldiers' songs. They have plenty of fire in them, I think."

Certainly, Mackenzie had plenty of brilliant, and cheerful, and stirring music that evening, but that which pleased him most, doubtless, was to see—as all the world could see—the happiness of his good lass. Sheila, proud and glad, with a light on her face that had not been there for many a day, wanted to do everything at once to please and amuse her guests, and most of all to wait upon her husband; and Lavender was so abashed by her sweet service and her simple ways that he could show his gratitude only by some furtive and kindly touch of the hand as Sheila passed. It seemed to him she had never looked so beautiful; and never, indeed, since they left Stornoway together, had he heard her quiet low laugh so full of enjoyment. What had he done, he asked himself, to deserve her confidence; for it was the hope in her proud and gentle eyes that gave that radiant brightness to her face? He did not know. He could not answer. Perhaps the forgiveness she had so freely and frankly tendered, and the confidence she now so clearly showed in him sprang from no judgment or argument, but were only the natural fruit of an abounding and generous love. More than once that night he wished

that Sheila could read the next half-dozen years as though in some prophetic scroll, that he might show her how he would endeavour to prove himself if not worthy—for he could scarcely hope that—at least conscious of her great and unselfish affection, and as grateful for it as a man could be.

They pushed their enjoyment to such a late hour of the night that when they discovered what time it was, Mackenzie would not allow one of them to venture out into the dark to find the path down to the yacht; and Duncan and Scarlett were forthwith called on to provide the belated guests with some more or less haphazard sleeping accommodation.

"Mr. Mackenzie," said Johnny, "I don't mind a bit if I sleep on the floor. I've just had the jolliest night I ever spent in my life. Mosenberg, you'll have to take the *Phœbe* back to Greenock by yourself. I shall never leave Borva any more."

"You will be sober in the morning, Mr. Eyre," young Mosenberg said; but the remark was unjust, for Johnny's enthusiasm had not been produced by the old King's whisky, potent as that was.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Princess Sheila.

"I SHOULD like," said Mrs. Edward Ingram, sitting down and contentedly folding her hands in her lap, "I should so much like, Edward, to have my own way for once—it would be so novel and so nice."

Her husband was busy with a whole lot of plans all stretched out before him, and with a pipe which he had some difficulty in keeping alight. He did not even turn round as he answered—

"You have your own way always. But you can't expect to have mine also, you know."

"Do you remember," she said, slowly, "anything your friend Sheila told you about your rudeness to people? I wish, Edward, you would leave those ragged children and their school-houses for three minutes. Do! I so much want to see some places when we go to Scotland; for who knows when we may be there again? I have set my heart on the Braes of Yarrow. And Loch Awe by moonlight. And the Pass of Glencoe——"

"My dear child," he said, at last turning round in his chair, "how can we go to those places? Sheila says Oban on the fifteenth."

"But what Sheila says isn't an Act of Parliament," said the young American lady, plaintively and patiently. "Why should you regulate all your movements by her? You are always looking to the north—you are like the spires of the churches that are said to be always telling us that heaven is close by the Pole Star."

"The information is inaccurate, my dear," Ingram said, looking at his pipe, "for the spires of the churches on the other side of the world point the other way. However, that does not matter. How do you propose rampaging all over Scotland, and still be at Oban on the fifteenth?"

"Telegraph to Mr. and Mrs. Lavender to come on to Edinburgh, and leave the trip to Lewis until we have seen those places. For once we have got to that wild island, who knows when we shall return? Now do, like a good boy. You know this new house of theirs will be all the drier in a month's time. And their yacht will be all the more ship-shape. And both Sheila and

her husband will be the better of coming down among civilized folks for a few weeks' time—especially just now, when numbers of their friends must be in the Highlands—and of course you get better attention at the hotels when the season is going on, and they have every preparation made—and I am told the heather and fern on the hills look very fine in August—and I am sure Mr. and Mrs. Lavender will enjoy it very much, if we get a carriage somewhere and leave the railways altogether, and drive by ourselves all through the prettiest districts."

She wished to see the effect of her eloquence on him. It was peculiar. He put his pipe down and gravely repeated these lines, with which she was abundantly familiar—

"Sez Vather to I, 'Jack, rin arter him du!'
Sez I to Vather, 'I'm darned if I du!'"

"You won't?" she said.

"The proposal comes too late. How can you expect Sheila to leave her new house, and that boy of hers that occupies three-fourths of her letters, just at this time? I think it was very kind of her, mind you, to come away down to Oban to meet us; and Lavender too, is giving up the time out of the best working-season of the year. Bless you, you will see far more beautiful things as we go from Oban to Lewis than any you have mentioned. For we shall probably cut down by Scarba and Jura before going up to Skye; and then you will see the coast that you admired so much in Lavender's pictures."

"Is the yacht a large one, Edward?" his wife asked, somewhat timidly.

"Oh, big enough to take our party, a dozen times over."

"Will she tumble about much, do you think?"

"I don't know," Ingram said, with an unkindly grin. "But as you are a weak vessel, Lavender will watch the weather for you, and give it you as smooth as possible. Besides, look at the cleanliness and comfort of a smart yacht! You are thinking of one of those Channel steamers, with their engines and oil."

"Let us hope for the best," said his wife, with a sigh.

They not only hoped for it, but got it. When they left the Crinan and got on board the big steamer that was to take them up to Oban, all around them lay a sea of soft and shining blue, scarcely marred by a ripple. Here and there sharp crags that rose out of the luminous plain seemed almost black; but the farther islands lay soft and hazy in the heat, with the beautiful colours of August tinting the great masses of rock. As they steamed northward through the shining sea, new islands and new channels appeared until they came in sight of the open Atlantic, and that, too, was as calm and as still as a summer night. There was no white cloud in the blue vault of the sky; there was no crisp curl of a wave on the blue plain of the sea; but everywhere a clear, radiant, salt-smelling atmosphere, the drowsy haze of which was only visible when you looked at the distant islands, and saw the fine and pearly veil of heat that was drawn over the soft colours of the hills. The sea-birds dipped and disappeared as the big boat churned its way onward. A white solan, far away by the shores of Mull, struck the water as he dived and sent a jet of spray into the air. Colonsay and Oronsay became as faint clouds on the southern horizon; the jagged coast of Lorne drew near. And then they went up through the Sound of Kerrara, and steamed into the broad

and beautiful bay of Oban, and behold! here was Sheila on the pier, already waving a handkerchief to them, while her husband held her arm, lest in her excitement she should go too near the edge of the quay.

"And where is the boat that we have heard so much of?" said Mrs. Kavanagh, when all the kissing and hand-shaking was over.

"There!" said Sheila, not without some shame-faced pride, pointing to a shapely schooner that lay out in the bay, with her white decks and tall spars shining in the afternoon sun.

"And what do you call her?" asked Mrs. Kavanagh's daughter.

"We call her *Princess Sheila*," said Lavender. "What do you think of the name?"

"You couldn't have got a better," Ingram said, sententiously, and interposing as if it was not within his wife's province to form an opinion of any sort. "And where is your father, Sheila? In Borva?"

"Oh no, he is here," the girl said, with a smile. "But the truth is, he has driven away to see some gentlemen he knows, to ask if he can have some grouse for you. He should have been back by this time."

"I would not hurry him, Sheila," Ingram said, gravely. "He could not have gone on a more admirable errand. We must await his return with composure. In the meantime, Lavender, do make your fellows stop that man: he is taking away my wife's trunk to some hotel or other."

The business of getting the luggage on board the yacht was entrusted to a couple of men whom Lavender left on shore; whereupon the newly-arrived travellers put off in a little pinnace and were conveyed to the side of the handsome schooner. When

they were on board, an eager exploration followed; and if Sheila could only have undertaken to vouch for the smoothness of the weather for the next month, Mrs. Ingram was ready to declare that at last she had discovered the most charming, and beautiful, and picturesque fashion of living known to civilized man. She was delighted with the little elegancies of the state-rooms; she was delighted with the paintings on the under skylights, which had been done by Lavender's own hand; she was delighted with the whiteness of the decks and the height of the tapering spars; and she had no words for her admiration of the beautiful sweep of the bay, the striking ruins of the old castle at the point, the rugged hills rising behind the white houses, and out there in the west, the noble panorama of mountain, and island, and sea.

"I am afraid, Mrs. Ingram," Lavender said, "you will have cause to know Oban before we leave it. There is not a breath of wind to take us out of the bay."

"I am content," she said, with a gracious calm.

"But we must get you up to Borva somehow. There it would not matter how long you were becalmed; for there is plenty to see about the island. But this is a trifle commonplace, you know."

"I don't think so at all. I am delighted with the place," she said. "And so are you, Edward."

Ingram laughed. He knew she was daring him to contradict her. He proposed he should go ashore and buy a few lines with which they might fish for young saithe or lythe over the side of the yacht; but this project was stopped by the appearance of the King of Borva, who bore triumphant proof of the success of his mission in a brace of grouse held up in

each hand as a small boat brought him out to the yacht.

"And I was seeing Mr. Hutcheson," Mackenzie said to Lavender, as he stepped on board, "and he is a ferry good-natured man whatever, and he says if there is no wind at all he will let one of his steamers take the yacht up to Loch Sunart, and if there is a breeze at all we will get it there."

"But why should we go in quest of a breeze?" Mrs. Ingram said, petulantly.

"Why, mem," said Mackenzie, taking the matter seriously, "you wass not thinking we could sail a boat without wind? But I am not sure that there will not be a breeze before night."

Mackenzie was right. As the evening wore on, and the sun drooped in the west, the aspect of affairs changed somewhat, and there was now and again a sort of shiver apparent on the surface of the lake-like bay. When, indeed, the people on board came up on deck just before dinner, they found a rather thunderous-looking sunset spreading over the sky. Into the clear saffron glory of the western sky some dark and massive purple clouds had risen. The mountains of Mull had grown light and milk-like; and yet they seemed near. The glass-like bay began to move; and the black shadow of a ship that lay on the gleaming yellow plain began to tremble, as the water cut lines of light across the reflection of the masts. You could hear voices afar off. Under the ruins of the castle, and along the curves of the coast, the shadows of the water were a pure green; and the rocks were growing still more sharp and distinct in the gathering dusk. There was a cold smell of the sea in the air. And then swiftly the pale colours of the west waxed lurid and fierce;

the mountains became of a glowing purple; and then all the plain of the sea was dashed with a wild glare of crimson, while the walls of Dunolly grew black, and overhead the first scouts of the marshalling forces of the clouds came up in flying shreds of gold and fire.

"Oh aye, we may hef a breeze the night," Mackenzie said.

"I hope we sha'n't have a storm," Mrs. Ingram said.

"A storm? Oh no, no storm at all. It will be a ferry good thing if the wind lasts till the morning."

Mackenzie was not at all sure that there would be storm enough; and went down to dinner with the others rather grumbling over the fineness of the weather. Indeed, when they came on deck again, later on in the night, even the slight breeze that he had hoped for seemed impossible. The night was perfectly still. A few stars had come out overhead, and their light scarcely trembled on the smooth waters of the bay. A cold, fresh scent of seaweed was about, but no wind. The orange lights in Oban burned pale and clear; the red and green lamps of the steamers and yachts in the bay did not move. And when Mrs. Ingram came up to take Sheila forward to the bow of the boat, to sit down there, and have a confidential talk with her, a clear and golden moon was rising over the sharp black ridge of Kerrara into the still and beautiful skies, and there was not a ripple of the water along the sides of the yacht to break the wonderful silence of the night.

"My dear," she said, "you have a beautiful place to live in."

"But we do not live here," Sheila said, with a smile. "This is to me as far away from home as England can be to you, when you think of America.

When I came here the first time I thought I had got into another world, and that I should never be able to get back again to the Lewis."

"And is the island you live in more beautiful than this place?" she asked, looking round on the calm sea, the lambent skies, and the far mountains beyond, which were grey and ghostlike in the pale glow of the moon.

"If you see our island on such a night as this, you will say it is the most beautiful place in the world. It is the winter-time that is bad, when we have rain and mist for weeks together. But after this year I think we shall spend all the winters in London; although my husband does not like to give up the shooting and the boating, and that is very good amusement for him when he is tired with his work."

"That island life certainly seems to agree with him," said Mrs. Ingram, not daring even to hint that there was any further improvement in Sheila's husband than that of mere health; "I have never seen him look so well and strong. I scarcely recognized him on the pier—he was so brown and—and I think his sailor-clothes suit him so well. They are a little rough you know—indeed, I have been wondering whether you made them yourself."

Sheila laughed.

"I have seen you look at them. No, I did not make them. But the cloth, that was made on the island, and it is very good cloth whatever."

"You see what a bad imitation of your costume I am compelled to wear. Edward would have it, you know. I think he'd like me to speak like you, if I could manage it."

"Oh no, I am sure he would not like that," Sheila

said, "for many a time he used to correct me, and when he first came to the island I was very much ashamed, and sometimes angry with him——"

"But I suppose you got accustomed to his putting everybody right?" said Mr. Ingram's wife, with a smile.

"He was always a very good friend to me," Sheila said, simply.

"Yes, and I think he is now," said her companion, taking the girl's hand, and forcing herself to say something of that which lay at her heart, and which had been struggling for utterance during all this beating about the bush. "I am sure you could not have a better friend than he is, and if you only knew how pleased we both are to find you so well—and so happy——"

Sheila saw the great embarrassment in her companion's face, and she knew the good feeling that had driven her to this stammering confession.

"It is very kind of you," Sheila said, gently. "I am very happy—yes—I do not think I have anything more to wish for in the world."

There was no embarrassment in her manner as she made this simple avowal; her face was clear and calm in the moonlight, and her eyes were looking somewhat distantly at the sea and the island near. Her husband came forward with a light shawl, and put it round her shoulders. She took his hand, and for a moment pressed it to her lips. Then he went back to where Ingram and old Mackenzie were smoking; and the two women were left to their confidences. Mrs. Kavanagh had gone below.

What was this great noise next morning, of the rattling of chains and the flapping of canvas overhead? There was a slight motion in the boat and a plashing of

water around her sides. Was the *Princess Sheila* getting under weigh?

The various noises ceased; so also did the rolling of the vessel, and apparently all was silent and motionless again. But when the ladies had dressed, and got upon deck, behold they were in a new world! All around them were the blue waters of Loch Linnhe, lit up by the brilliant sunshine of the morning. A light breeze was just filling the great white sails; and the yacht, heeling over slightly, was cutting her placid way through the lapping waves. How keen was the fresh smell of the air! Sea-gulls were swooping down and around the tall masts: over there the green island of Lismore lay bright in the sunshine; the lonely hills of Morven and the mountains of Mull had a thousand shades of colour glowing on their massive shoulders and slopes; the ruins of Duart Castle, out at the point, seemed too fair and picturesque to be associated with dark legends of blood. Were these faint specks in the south the far islands of Colonsay and Oronsay? Lavender brought his glass to Mrs. Ingram, and, with many apologies to all the ladies for having woke them up so soon, bade her watch the flight of two herons making in for the mouth of Loch Etive.

They had postponed for the present that southward trip to Jura. The glass was still rising; and the appearance of the weather rendered it doubtful whether they might have wind enough to make such a cruise anything but tedious. They had taken advantage of this light breeze in the morning to weigh anchor and stand across for the Sound of Mull; if it held out, they would at least reach Tobermony, and take their last

look at a town before rounding Ardnamurchan and making for the wild solitudes of Skye.

"Well, Cis," Ingram said to his wife, as he busied himself with a certain long fishing line, "what do you think of the Western Highlands?"

"Why did you not tell me of these places before?" she said, rather absently; for the mere height of the mountains along the Sound of Mull—the soft green woods leading up to the great bare shoulders of purple, and grey, and brown above—seemed to draw away one's eyes and thoughts from surrounding objects.

"I have, often. But what is the use of telling?"

"It is the most wonderful place I have ever seen," she said. "It is so beautiful and so desolate at the same time. What lovely colours there are everywhere, on the sea, and on the shores there, and up the hills; and everything is so bright and gleaming. But no one seems to live here. I suppose you couldn't. The loneliness of the mountains and the sea would kill you."

"My dear child, these are town-bred fancies," he said, in his usual calm and carelessly sententious manner; "if you lived there, you would have plenty to do besides looking at the hills and the sea. You would be glad of a fine day to let you go out and get some fish, or go up the hills and get some blackcock for your dinner; and you would not get sad by looking at fine colours, as town-folks do. Do you think Lavender and Sheila spend their time in mooning up in that island of theirs?—and that, I can tell you, is a trifle more remote and wild than this is. They've got their work to do; and when that is done they feel comfortable and secure in a well-built house, and fairly pleased with themselves that they have earned some rest and amusement. I daresay, if you built a

cottage over there, and did nothing but look at the sea and the hills, and the sky at night, you would very soon drown yourself. I suppose if a man were to give himself up for three months to thinking of the first formation of the world, and the condition of affairs before that happened, and the puzzle about how the materials ever came to be there, he would grow mad. But few people luckily have the chance of trying. They've got their bread to earn; if they haven't, they're bent on killing something or other—foxes, grouse, deer, and what not—and they don't bother about the stars, or what lies just outside the region of the stars. When I find myself getting miserable about the size of a mountain, or the question as to how and when it came there, I know that it is time to eat something. I think breakfast is ready, Cis. Do you think you have nerve to cut this hook out of my finger? and then we can go below."

She gave a little scream, and started up. Two drops of blood had fallen on Lavender's white decks.

"No, I see you can't," he said. "Open this knife, and I will dig it out myself. Bless the girl, are you going to faint because I have scratched my finger?"

Lavender, however, had to be called in to help; and, while the surgical operation was going forward, Mrs. Ingram said—

"You see we have got town's-folks' hands as yet. I suppose they will get to be leather by and by. I am sure I don't know how Mrs. Lavender can do those things about a boat with the tiny little hands she has."

"Yes, Sheila has small hands, hasn't she?" Lavender said, as he bound up his friend's finger, "but then she makes up for that by the bigness of heart."

It was a pretty and kindly speech, and it pleased

Mrs. Ingram, though Sheila did not hear it. Then, when the doctoring was over, they all went below for breakfast, and an odour of fish, and ham, and eggs, and coffee, prevailed throughout the yacht.

"I have quite fallen in love with this manner of life," Mrs. Ingram said. "But, tell me, is it always as pleasant as this? Do you always have those blue seas around you, and green shores? Are the sails always white in the sunlight?"

There was a dead silence.

"Well, I would not say," Mackenzie observed, seriously, as no one else would take up the question; "I would not say it is always ferry good weather off this coast—oh no, I would not say that; for if there wass no rain, what would the cattle do, and the streams? —they would not hef a pool left in them. Oh yes, there is rain sometimes; but you cannot always be sailing about, and when there will be rain, you will hef your things to attend to indoors. And there is always plenty of good weather if you wass wanting to tek a trip round the islands, or down to Oban—oh yes, there is no fear of that; and it will be a ferry good coast whatever for the harbour, and there is always some place you can put into, if it wass coming on rough, only you must know the coast, and the lie of the islands, and the rocks about the harbours. And you would learn it very soon. There is Sheila there; there is no one in the Lewis will know more of the channels in Loch Roag than she does—not one, I can say that; and when you go further away, then you must tek some one with you who wass well acquaint with the coast. If you wass thinking of having a yacht, Mr. Ingram, there is one I hef heard of just now in

Rothesay that is for sale, and she is a ferry good boat, but not so big as this one——"

"I think we'll wait till my wife knows more about it, Mr. Mackenzie," Ingram said. "Wait till she gets round Ardnamurchan, and has crossed the Minch, and has got the final Atlantic swell as you run in to Borvabost."

"Edward, you frighten me," his wife said; "I was beginning to give myself courage."

"But it is mere nonsense!" cried Mackenzie, impatiently. "Kott pless me! There is no chance of your being ill in this fine weather; and if you had a boat of your own, you would ferry soon get accustomed to the weather—oh, ferry soon indeed—and you would hef no more fear of the water than Sheila has."

"Sheila has far too little fear of the water," her husband said.

"Indeed, and that is true," said her father; "and it is not right that a young lass should go about by herself in a boat——"

"But you know very well, papa, that I never do that now."

"Oh, you do not do it now," grumbled Mackenzie. "No, you do not do it now. But some day you will forget, when there is something to be done, and you will run a great danger, Sheila."

"But she has promised never to go out by herself; haven't you, Sheila?" her husband said.

"I did. I promised that to you. And I have never been out since by myself."

"Well, don't forget, Sheila," said her father, not very sure but that some sudden occasion might tempt the girl to her old deeds of recklessness.

The two American ladies had little to fear. The Hebrides received them with fair sunshine and smooth

seas; and all the day long their occupation was but to watch the wild birds flying from island to island, and mark the gliding by of the beautiful coasts, and listen to the light rushing of the waves as the fresh sea-breeze flew through the rigging. And Sheila was proud to teach them something of the mystery of sailing a small craft, and would give them the tiller sometimes, while her eye, as clear and keen as her father's, kept watch and ward over the shapely vessel that was making for the northern seas. One evening she said to her friends—

"Do you see that point that runs out on this side of the small islands? Round that we enter Loch Roag."

The last pale light of the sun was shining along the houses of Borvabost as the *Princess Sheila* passed. The people there had made out the yacht long ere she came close to land; and Mackenzie knew that twenty eager scouts would fly to tell the news to Scarlett and Duncan, so that ample preparation would be made in the newly-finished house down by the sea. The wind, however, had almost died away; and they were a long time getting into Loch Roag in this clear twilight. They who were making their first visit to Sheila's island sat contentedly enough on deck, however, amazed and bewildered by the beauty of the scene around them. For now the sun had long sunk, but there was a glow all over the heavens, and only in the far east did the yellow stars begin to glimmer over the dark plain of the Loch. Mealasabhal, Suainabhal, Cracabhal, lifted their grand shoulders and peaks into this wondrous sky, and stood dark and clear there, with the silence of the sea around them. As the night came on the yellow stars grew more intense overhead, but the lambent glow in the north did not pale. They

entered a small bay. Up there on a plateau of the rocks stood a long, low house, with all its windows gleaming in the dusk. The pinnace was put off from the yacht; in the strange silence of the night the ripples plashed around her prow; her oars struck fire in the water as the men rowed in to the land. And then, as Sheila's guests made their way up to the house, and when they reached the verandah, and turned to look at the sea, and the Loch, and the far mountains opposite, they beheld the clear and golden sickle of the moon rising from behind the black outline of Suainabhal into the soft and violet skies. As the yellow moon rose in the south, a pathway of gold began to tremble on Loch Roag, and they could see the white curve of sand around the bay. The air was sweet with the cold smell of the sea. There was a murmur of the far Atlantic all around the silent coast.

It was the old familiar picture that had charmed the imagination of Sheila's first and only lover, when as yet she was to him as some fair and wonderful Princess, living in a lonely island, and clothed round about with the glamour of old legends and stories of the sea. Was she any longer this strange Sea-Princess, with dreams in her eyes, and the mystery of the night and the stars written in her beautiful face? Or was she to him now—what all the world had long ago perceived her to be—a tender wife, a faithful companion, and a true and loyal-hearted woman? Sheila walked quietly into the house; there was something for her friends to see; and, with a great pride, and a gentleness, and a gladness, Scarlett was despatched on a particular errand. The old King of Borva was still down at the yacht, looking after the landing of certain small articles of luggage. Duncan had come

forward to Ingram and said, "And are you ferry well, sir?" and Mairi, come down from Mackenzie's house, had done the same. Then there was a wild squeal of the pipes in the long apartment where supper was laid—the unearthly gathering-cry of a clan; until Sheila's husband dashed into the place and threatened to throw John into the sea if he did not hold his peace. John was offended, and would probably have gone up the hill-side, and, in revenge, played, "Mackrimmon shall no more return," only that he knew the irate old King of Borva would, in such a case, literally fulfil the threat that had been lightly uttered by his son-in-law. In another room, where two or three women were together, one of them suddenly took both Sheila's hands in hers, and said, with a look of kindness in her eyes—"My dear, I can believe now what you told me that night at Oban."

And Sheila's heart was too full to make answer.

THE END.

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